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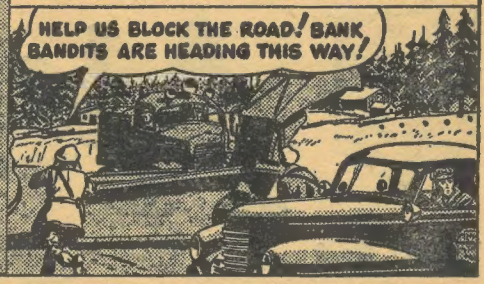

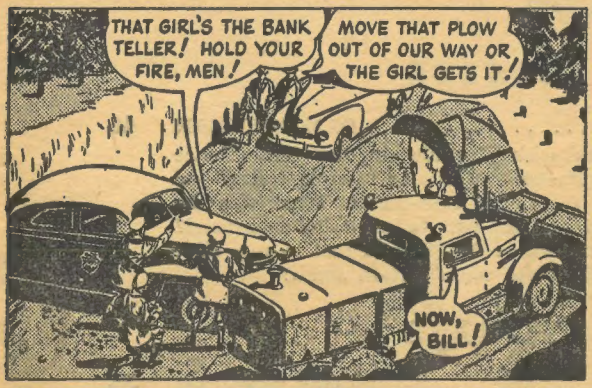

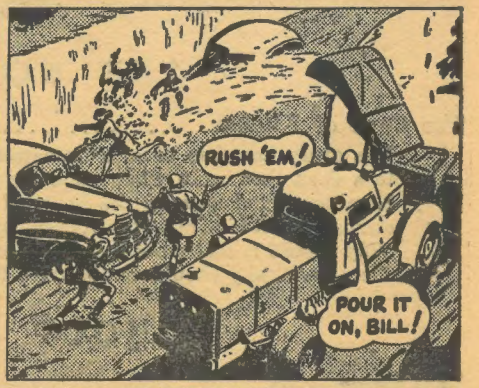

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Vol. 117, No. 2 for June, 1947 Best of New Stories

THE NOVELETTE

The Cask of Khabar..... DAN CUSHMAN 44

The grisly contents of a cedrela-wood cask plus his singular resemblance to a dead man were what led Craig Thebes—self-styled "jungle tramp"—to Kembawe Plantation in the heart of the Congo rain-forest. What was the strange secret hidden within its heavily guarded, barb-wire circled compound? Why should it cost more than the diamonds of Jungfontein just to stay alive there—and why should escape from the place mean certain death?

SHORT STORIES

Last Drive..... FRANK BONHAM 34

It was the end of the line for the stagecoach—and for old Bill Underhill as well. The railroads' iron monsters were replacing the high-wheeled Concords, and for the grizzled stage-driver total blindness was near at hand. Now Bill had but one ambition—to handle the reins on that final drive from Tucson to Iron Pipe before the sun went down.

Do Not Molest the Miracles (an off-the-trail-story) SAMUEL W. TAYLOR 80

Who says there aren't any miracles? Ever seen a twin-engined magic carpet soaring overhead? Or a pair of seven-league boots with a Ford nameplate? Herewith, then, the Greene Corners town-council report to the Hon. Zachary Z. Satchel anent a remarkable occurrence in that village, and offering a completely unorthodox (albeit infallibly effective) solution to the housing problem.

Doghole Circuit..... STEVE HAIL 90

Captain Garrett, quondam skipper of the Island Lines' proud flagship *Queen*, had been demoted to the inter-island trade—proving-ground for youth and graveyard for failures. Black voyage to oblivion was all his new berth meant to him until the night his old command, the *Queen*, grounded off Kailua Point. Then, like a salt-sea phoenix rising from the deep, Garrett set his course for new horizons—and his old ship followed in his wake.

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The Crazy Kind..... CLIFTON ADAMS 100

Bullies always get licked, don't they? The hell they do! Watch the script go haywire with Duke Hastings, ex-pug from Chi, taking an unholy pasting from Hack Lawson, whose greatest joy in life was making life miserable for his oil-field crew. Of course it would all be different in the ring under Queensberry rules if the Duke's legs held out. (Or would it?) They were good for exactly three rounds.

SERIALS

He Who Rides the Tiger (1st of 5 parts)..... JAMES NORMAN 8

When David Armour awoke to find himself lying, desperately ill, on a *k'ang* in Feng Wang Mission, he could remember nothing that had happened since a certain luncheon at the Wagon-Lits Hotel in Peking back in 1940—six long years ago. He'd lost not only half-a-dozen years of life but all memory of where he'd hidden the fabulously precious T'ang bronzes he'd secreted just before the Japs moved in on China. And then, of course, there was that haunting fear that he'd collaborated with the Nips all through their Occupation. Didn't every bit of evidence point that way?

Salmon Sweepstakes (conclusion)..... ROBERT E. PINKERTON 108

The homestretch! . . . With Don Cameron and his bête noire, Ash Moulton, sweeping neck and neck along the final furlong, with control of the Ketchikan salmon fisheries the prize at stake. Horses or humpbacks—they were all the same to Marty Boyle, the race-wise little gambler, for he knew that in either case, over the long laps, blood and class and form were bound to pay off.

FACT STORIES

Odyssey of the Mounted..... JOHN D. PUNTIN 43

It was a grave breach of International Law when a squadron of Royal North West Mounted Police thundered across the Canadian line and onto the North Dakota plains back in the summer of 1874—and the "border incident" has never been officially recognized. But to terrified American settlers holding off the plundering Sioux till U.S. Cavalry could reach the scene, the red-coated Mounties were a welcome sight indeed.

Iron Man of the Hoh..... MURRAY MORGAN 126

When old John Huelsdonk, last of the Pioneers, died last year, everyone who'd ever heard of him was surprised to learn of his passing. Most had always regarded him as just a myth, and those who knew different expected him to live forever. A legend in his own time, John lives on in history for, as one logger put it: "What did this guy Bunyan ever do that the Iron Man couldn't do better?"

VERSE

Prairie in the Stars..... WALTER W. STEPHEN 89

Where the trails through the universe echo
With the songs that the cowhands sing.

Adventure..... LOWE W. WREN 132

Adventure lives beyond dull lanes and gates.
No man can herd it with his little stick.

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Cover painted for Adventure by Peter Stevens
Kenneth S. White, Editor

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

JAMES NORMAN, whose new Quinto serial gets under way on page 8 this month, catches us up on the background of his yarn and his own activities during the past few years, with the following—

The seeds for "He Who Rides the Tiger" were sown both in Luzon and Japan and the crop harvested after a brief flying visit to the China coast.

While in the Pacific with the Army, first as a combat correspondent during operations, then as a Public Relations and Civil Information hand, I ran across three rather curious incidents which sparked the novel.

After the divisions of Gen. Walter Krueger captured Manila I used to bed-down at the home of Gen. Basilio Valdes (Chief of Staff, Philippine Army) during my occasional visits in the city. And there I frequently indulged in evenings at chess with an 80-year-old Chinese gentleman—an amazing gentleman. He had a fine, wispy beard, twinkling eyes, a keen sense of humor. He repeatedly licked me at chess and if he had wanted to, he could have beaten me 6-0, 6-0 at tennis.

The old Chinese had been a supply purchaser for the Kuomintang Government and had been caught in Manila when the Japanese invaded the Islands. Knowing that the old man might be shot by the Japanese if they caught him, the women of the Valdes family hid him in their house throughout the occupation of Manila. For over five years the old man vanished from the world, living an almost monastic existence in a small room in the house on Rua Hidalgo—not more than a hundred yards from a Japanese military police quartel. His family in Shanghai thought he was dead, so did the Chinese Government.

I became intrigued by the thought of how many men had vanished from world notice during the war, all of which set me in a frame of mind to do the Quinto book.

The next story gimmicks came when we entered Kyoto, Japan—a city of over a thousand temples, a center of arts and handicrafts. Kyoto and Peiping are the Florence and the Paris of the Orient.

There, while doing Public Relations and Civil Information work, we received tips that the Japanese authorities had hidden valuable treasures in some of the temples. At one shrine we (the CIC) found a cache of jewels and bar-silver. At another drums of hi-octane gas. At still another, a jeep. So there I located the basis for the quest idea.

During that time I spent a good deal of time with Japanese news reporters and they helped me dig up a number of interesting stories—most fabulous among them was the story of an American Buddhist priest. It took some while to locate him, though it turned out his temple was less than a half-mile from where I lived.

This man, whose name will have to remain unmentioned, was an Army major during World War I. He had served in France. After the war and in the early 1920's he became interested in Oriental religions. He went to Japan, studied there, decided to become a Buddhist. He studied for the priesthood, took his vows and became a member of one of the two largest Buddhist sects in Japan. He was there through all of this war, untouched by it and the Japanese.

And there you have adventure story material more spectacular than anything the best of us could devise.

Bringing you up to date in regard to myself, there's not much to add to what appeared in Camp-Fire when the first Quinto yarn, *"Viva China!"* appeared in *Adventure* back in December, 1941. (The serial was brought out in book form by Morrow under the title "Murder, Chop Chop," you'll recall.)

I was in the midst of a Davie Coster novelette for *Adventure* when the Army dragged me. It's still unfinished. The Army made me an infantryman, shipped me to the Pacific with the rank of private. After a spell on Leyte I joined a combat-correspondent team on Luzon. For four months thereafter I moved up with relentless progression through the grades of Cpl., Buck Sgt., Staff Sgt., and then via a direct field commission, a shavetail and shortly afterward, 1st Lt. Because my assignment was to do magazine features and pick my own stories, my range of travel was pretty wide and rapid— bombing missions; with the infantry during the taking of Baguio; air-drops, etc.

In Japan did public relations for General

(Continued on page 133)

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HE WHO RIDES

The flower reshaped, became a face touched with the lingering artfulness of a Chinese woman's smile.

"He who rides the tiger finds it difficult to dismount."

—North China Proverb

By

JAMES

NORMAN

THE TIGER

A HALO of near terror surrounded his senses when he turned his gaze toward the doorway where the heavy wooden screen should have been. It was not there now. The agile yellow sunlight splashing through the latticed paper-window had dissolved the screen in its terrifying chemistry of light. Everything around him that was not identified with his resolute effort of concentration decomposed, became tawny floods of restless dust.

The dust hovered, swirled, formed and reformed fantastic shapes. It became a glowing tiger, a dark jade tiger crouching bold and huge near the doorway. Sometimes there was only its purring. At times nothing but a soundless, bodyless cat-paw tantalizing a pale lotus blossom floating upon thin air. Swirling currents of sunlight gently stirred the flower. This time the tiger turned its head, staring at him for an instant with round green eyes. In that moment the flower reshaped, became

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

a face, a face touched with the lingering artfulness of a Chinese woman's smile, a face with lovely eyes, dark, almond-shaped and with very long black lashes that swept the cheek. Slowly and still spinning, the face faded and became a flower once more. The jade tiger noticed the change too. As though subtly disturbed, the dark cat carefully hid the blossom beneath a patch of sunlight lying on the floor, then stepped into another elongation of light that began whirling faster, faster and faster. . .

DAVID ARMOUR'S eyes widened in edgeless horror and he forced himself up, body rigid, his skin crawling and cold with moisture. With effort he made the nameless swirling slow down and finally stop. When its motion had played out he slowly and steadily flattened the shapes within the room with his feverish stare until the screen stood back in its place before the doorway. He fell back exhausted, eyes wandering yet always alert to leap back, to hold the shape of the wooden screen immobile with their sheer strength of glance.

His gaze moved around the earthwalled room, pressing beyond the faded blue, cotton curtains of the mosquito net framing his bed. With absent curiosity he stared at the thatch roof laced against ceiling rafters with hempen ropes, then observed the framed Chinese scroll hanging upon one wall. Its characters were in broad, bold springing script, the *ts-ao* style, saying, *"Huan Wo Shan Ho."* He translated it to mean, "Give Back Our Mountains and Rivers." Whose mountains? A blue glazed porcelain drum stood in one corner and beside it an uncarved wooden chest. His unquestioning interest returned to his bed, a raised earthen *k'ang* or platform bed. Unlike most *k'angs* this one possessed a cotton-filled mattress rather than a thin sleeping mat. It puzzled him vaguely, just as he was puzzled by the thinness of his body lying upon the pallet—a body toward which he had feelings of possession, yet a body which did not appear to be his own.

"He's still asleep."

A voice? A Swedish accented voice? Armour's nerves grew taut. He questioned the reality, the embodiment of that voice.

Like an echo of the voice, a shadow momentarily obscured the sunlight. He realized his eyes had been shut, betraying his vigilance. Concerned that the shadow-makers should not escape him this time, he opened his eyes quickly and a wave of frenzied elation welled up within him. He had caught them! Not merely caught them, but for an instant he had stopped them in unbreathing rigidity, like shadow images cast and fixed upon a wall. He saw the huge one who wore a pistol and who was the first to move again, vanishing through the doorway. The other, not so agile, was a wiry man with a bald head, the skin upon it so white it was the skull-piece of a clown.

He was always certain the two would return, that he could make them come back as often and remain as long as did the jade tiger. At first he had only suspected their existence. His impressions gradually sharpened during those endless dream-like alternations—day and night, days into nights filled with images, their quality truncated, unreal and anachronistic. The impressions shaped and hardened until he really began to see them. Having noted the clown-like skullpiece was one landmark. His next achievement occurred when he forced them to appear and made them stand against the backlight from the paper window, they staring at him wordlessly, he returning the stare for as long as he wanted them to remain. It became a game, a monstrous test of will.

Each day after that momentous instant when he had first solidified their shapes and differences he made them stay longer. He contemplated them with a still sick, savage and invulnerable curiosity, noting each peculiarity in them so that they could not change on him.

The dry, wiry small man with the clown-white scalp sometimes came with a disconcerting odor of antiseptics about him. The odor puzzled Armour. The other man interested him even more. On him he spent his greatest efforts conjuring irrevocable details of face and figure: the huge informality of the man, the dark, military cropped hair, the broad face burned to the brownness of ridden saddle leather, the stride like that of a hunting cat. For all his largeness, this one looked mild-mannered and smudgy-eyed. He had a disconcerting habit of building himself unshapely yellow cigarettes no matter how

strongly Armour tried to keep him from smoking. The intolerable cigarette dangled from heavy lips and the smoke curled idly up his face.

Armour did not talk to them. Should he try to make them talk? He vaguely remembered the Swedish accent and wondered if they were a part of it. He had made them so real they had driven the jade tiger away, so real they could almost talk. Another time and he would think of something and force them to talk.

ONE day they did not come when he willed it. He seemed only able to surround himself with the bleak solidity of the room, and even this had changed. A thought taunted the fringes of his consciousness. Why was he here? The room with its mud walls built by pounding earth between two boards was familiar, but for how long had it been familiar? He tried to think back and he became frightened for the paths of his thoughts seemed to slip away into nothingness.

A sound from the doorway drew his glance there. He saw the two men walk in, not as he had expected or wanted it, but as men in their own rights. The bald one came to the *k'ang* and looked down at him through the netting, eyes ferocious and blue. He wore an ancient, tattered, yet spotlessly white medical smock. Armour stared at him gravely. He would make them talk today. This was the day.

"Who are you?"

His own voice sounded strange and ridiculous, asking questions of someone his mind had fabricated.

"Feeling better, eh?" the bald one said. His accent was Swedish.

"How should I feel?"

"You recognize us?"

"Of course."

The answer seemed to please the bald one for he glanced toward the other man and nodded. Armour looked toward the big man. He had not come near the *k'ang*. He still wore his ivory-handled pistol strapped to a barrel-like chest. The gun was in odd contrast to the loose fitting, sagging pea-green trousers and cotton shirt the man wore.

Armour's attention returned to the bald one's white smock. The shape and the meaning of these men began to change before him. The meaning of the room changed, grew brighter and clearer. The impressions within his mind swerved sharply; his roaring, laboring brain was no longer pumping thoughts, it was grinding sand, not ideas, not memories. He clutched his furious temples in both hands grasping at some baffling, sentient conception. . . . A Chinese hospital. . . He was sick. . . . Why had he said he knew these men? He did not.

Shaking panic ached through his body as he tried to sit up. "What am I—" His incredulous and hysteric stare framed the room, the spirit screen, the drum stool, the latticed windows, then these men. He now looked at them with the hard, unfeeling and meaningless speculation one turns upon total strangers.

"Why am I here?" he demanded.

"No hurry, no hurry," said the one with the clown-white skull. His voice was dry, relaxing, although his eyes still contained their furious blueness. "Don't excite yourself too much. You've been ill, very ill."

A fresh panic stormed through him. "Where's Ade? Where is she?"

"Ade?"

"Adrian. My wife."

Again the bald one glanced toward the big man now seated on the drum stool in the corner. The large man nodded, saying nothing. The bald one looked compassionately at Armour.

"You're at Feng Yang Mission," he said. "I'm Doctor Larson, missionary and doctor. I'm sorry, your wife isn't here."

"Where is she?"

"Shanghai, possibly."

"But why?"

He felt the doctor force his shoulders back upon the pallet. "You've been in a bad way," the doctor said. "Need more rest, no excitement. Better take nourishment now."

The big man rose from his corner stool and left the room.

"Feng Yang?" Armour murmured, bewildered.

"We're near Hsu-chau," replied the doctor. He spoke and gently pushed Armour's eyelid back, his intense blue eyes staring as though studying a malignant culture laid bare in the orb of a microscope. "Take the country between Peiping and Nanking and chop it in half,

that's Feng Yang. I've been here for years, built this mission-hospital up from mud. The people call me 'top-side-heaven-pidgin-iodine-man.'" He dropped Armour's lid and nodded satisfied. "Yes, you've been quite ill."

ARMOUR'S hands reached for his head again, a physical, futile effort to fight against the cold, hysterical terror edging back within him. He wanted to babble things, childishly, disconnectedly, idiotically. "I'm not sick—" He began to cry.

The missionary shrugged, his glance sliding over Armour's frame. Armour's gaze followed and was numbed again by the incredible gauntness of his body, the absence of warm, hard flesh to curtain the stark lines of his ribs. He shut his eyes for an instant. It was fantastic and unthinkable, but he could not remember having been sick. He heard the missionary's dry voice: "Malnutrition. Months of it."

He opened his eyes to meet the doctor's blue stare. Thoughtfully, thinking and forming words at the same time, he said, "I ate yesterday."

"Where? Here?"

"At the Wagon-Lits Hotel in Peking." When he had said it he realized the madness of its logic, the very telling of it emerging shadowy and burlesqued. The missionary shook his head.

"You've been on this *k'ang* two months. You've been blown up with fever and delirium. Do you know who you are?"

Armor stared at the man's peaked, dry face, the northern eyes and the stark white bald skull. It was too insane and completely maddening. He could still remember the taste of lunch at the Grand Hotel des Wagon-Lits, and at the same time he began to doubt the reasonableness of that taste. "Certainly I know who I am," he replied. "Don't be ridiculous."

"Well?"

"David Armour." He said it with an air of challenge.

The missionary's brows lifted slightly as though what he had said was important. "Do you have an idea of when you left Peiping or came to this region?"

Armour shook his head. The effort of reaching back into his memory tired him until his laboring attempts at concentration seemed only able to wonder why the doctor persisted in calling Peking by its ancient, and later, republican name of Peiping, almost as if the Japanese were no longer around to enforce that it be known as Peking. He almost felt relieved when the huge man with the pistol strapped across his chest came in with a tea bowl filled with bean milk.

The man set it upon the *k'ang* and occupied his old position upon the stool, still saying nothing either by mouth or eye.

"Take it," said the missionary, nodding toward the tea bowl. "Then see what you remember. Perhaps you can tell me what you were doing in Peiping."

The question struck Armour as totally preposterous. He knew very well what he was doing. "The Commission," he said.

"Commission?"

"Of course. I'm associated with the Joint International Commission of Sinologues. That's why I went to Peking. We've been making a survey of war damages to Chinese national treasures, temples, museums and so on. We came to see what measures the Japanese officials are taking to safeguard these things. We haven't had too much cooperation from the Japanese officials but—"

His attention suddenly stopped against the bowl upon the *k'ang*. Now, with abrupt insistence, he asked, "Why am I here?"

"Take the milk," replied the missionary. The man held forth his palm. There were two pills in the cup of it. "Take these, too. Settle your nerves. Get some sleep and we'll go over it later." He looked down at Armour with blue-eyed and complete detachment. He said, "You've been dead six years, man."

CHAPTER II

THE MAN CALLED CHIAO

TO ADRIAN ARMOUR the city was not what it had been before the war. Like the mutations in her own life, something had changed in the city, something had gone out of it. She gazed through her window, staring across the sun-jelled afternoon toward the teeming river below and the broad river-front Shanghai Bund.

Down there the old familiar things remained as though no battles had violently interrupted their century-old continuity: American and British freighters lay in their moorings as before, a fleet of somber Chinese junks crossed the eddying yellow channel, their dark patched sails suggesting huge butterflies. On the Bund the old, amazing variety of traffic, the scurrying of leaning rickshaw runners, the rumble of buses and street-cars, and a peppering of the new and quick jeeps, was as thick as ever. Nevertheless, a certain spirit was gone. Even the ugliest skyline in the world, the bland and arrogant buildings along the Bund which had always looked out over the river with triumphant airs of profit and no losses, now seemed less certain of themselves. It was as if Shanghai were waiting vainly for something, perhaps an era, that would never return.

She turned from the window and stared vacuously at the clutter of papers, advertising copy in English and Chinese, bills and announcements scattered upon her small desk. She wanted to cry—not because of the confusion of papers, but because of what the city, the papers and the waiting did to her. The ache and hurt within her heart was constant. Perhaps it was no longer her love for Dave but rather her own stubbornness that forced her to wait. The habit of waiting had grown strong and obdurate with time; it had become so strong that the hope of finding her husband had become a mechanical habit rather than a real desire.

Today the ache was deepened, crystallized by a letter on her desk which ended:

> Ade, you must think of yourself. You're still young and can't waste yourself like this. Dad has learned that the State and War Departments have given up all hope. They've closed the case. Do come home, Ade. We're expecting you, and Dad needs you.
>
> Love, Sis

She had faced the meanings in the letter and had now decided to return home. The decision was like the irrevocable destruction of a part of her life, the most vividly remembered part, and also the destruction of David Armour. The almost mad, wonderful love which had brought them together so long ago had now become an uprooted, tortured emotion.

A Chinese office boy with a wide, ingenuous grinning face set upon the tight collar of his spartan blue gown came to her desk. He gave her a calling card.

"Respectful old man wish to see editor."

She glanced at the card. On one side of its small, neat face she saw the Chinese characters without trying to translate them. Turning it over, she read the English printed upon the opposite face.

MR WU-SHIH
Writer fine topical feature news up to date

"Ask him to wait, Sammy." She put the card down. A sense of sentiment made her delay the caller. She glanced toward the window again and the view of the Bund. She wanted to sit for a while, alone, remembering; so much of the drama of eight years was centered here.

THE hazy Kiangsu sky beyond and the spread of the river below was not just China—it was David Armour, for he was China, he had had China in his blood, knowing it, loving it, in a way which she could never understand. She recalled how they had met in New York at her sister's home. He had come to appraise a Chinese porcelain. Even there, that first time, she had felt his attachment to the Orient. You never noticed that he was in his middle-thirties or that his collars fitted loosely around his neck as though he were careless of such things. All that you saw was the lively curiosity lighting his gray eyes. You sensed the tempering of humor within him and you had gotten the impression that he was more of a scholar than a man who was at home in the back corridors of two completely different civilizations.

She had come back to China with him shortly before the war and had been with him for one wonderful year, the two of them never being apart until he had vanished in Peiping. What followed had been sheer nightmare: the unflagging, desperate search cut short by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. How she had chafed during the year of internment at Shanghai; how she had hated the *Gripsholm* which had taken her away from the Orient during an exchange of prisoners; and how she had resented the war years at home sepa-

rating her from the possibility of finding Dave.

At war's end she had come back and taken up the search with the same unchanging, unerring steadfastness. She had gone wherever they had permitted her to go—Peiping, Nanking, Tientsin—and places where entry had been forbidden. She had become a woman with a fixation, a stubbornness and a mission. Finally, when there seemed to be nowhere else to search, she settled to waiting. She had taken a job here at the *News*.

She shook the thoughts from her mind and, glancing at the card on her desk, rang for Sammy.

"Mr. Wu," she said.

The boy showed a frail, elderly Chinese in. The old man bowed before her. "I am unworthy," he said.

Adrian smiled. The man wore the handsomeness of age well. He was apparently a man who had learned the art of growing old gracefully without having the process interrupted by war. Completely Mandarin in his every gesture, he gently touched his thin wispy white beard with long fragile fingernails covered with three-inch curving silver fingernail guards.

"What can I do for you?" Adrian asked.

Mr. Wu bowed once more. "Do not let me trouble your chariot."

"It is nothing. My obligation," Adrian filled out the customary formalities, a thing she had learned from Dave.

The old man smiled happily, all the while fingering his beard and putting on the discreet airs of a *hsiu ts'ai*, a man of flowering talent. "This unworthy one has stories wish to dispose of," he murmured. "Of course, with moderate profit to self."

"News stories?"

"Stories of feature events, interior China, excellent hero, of current happenings in the English dialogue."

Adrian smiled politely, covering her amusement. The old man responded, smiling and showing a set of broken gold-capped teeth. He winked significantly. "You honorable editor?"

"No, I'm sorry. Mr. Byrnes is."

"It must give me happiness to relate happenings to Mr. Byrnes. Very important happenings."

She glanced toward the door of the editorial room that muffled the garrulous and insistent fury of the teletype within. "May I see the article?" she asked. "If it's important Mr. Byrnes will speak with you."

MR. WU seemed to have trouble untangling his glance from among the keys of an American adding-machine on a nearby desk. His expression was one of awe for he was thinking of China's two great, ancient technicians, the Ho brothers, who, upon inventing the abacus, had died of laughter.

"The article, Mr. Wu," Adrian repeated.

"Ah, sorry." Mr. Wu became alert. From within the folds of his gown he brought forth a folded paper.

Adrian scanned the story, penned in a stiff, precise Palmer Method hand. The text, in English, was embroidered with the flowery touch of an Old China essay.

> Under the canopy of heaven and within the circumference of the earth are many different happenings. High in interest among these said events are the doings of well known scholar and archeologist Mr. David Armour in recent times—

A wild shock of hope, a tenseness filled her as she stared at the trembling sheet of paper, her anxious eyes leaping across the span of words.

> —Mr. Armour shortly before seven-coat-weather in season of Cold Dew in American-style year 1941 feeling impulse to help China and not wishing to cause embarrassment to own Government clothes self in surname of Chiao and becomes scourge of Japanese bandits and Japan-loving-puppet-officials then in China. Soon fame of Chiao spread over rural country, defeating great enemy garrison at Tung Ping in Shantung, upsetting heavy locomotive near Feng-ti, destroying four Japanese Corporals and one officer of Lieutenant at Feng-Yang in first year of battle.
>
> Following many seasons of glory hero Chiao, popularly observed in Shanghai as Mr. Armour, is caught up by extended illness. Like inflexible bamboo which has served its forest well and protect house of China from wind of invasion, Chiao falls. It is only this week the lost Mr. Armour returns to the visible world, found in remote missionary hospital in Shantung Province by this scholar.
>
> (Continued next installment.)

"David—" The single sound escaped her lips. Then she felt something gray and shapeless collide with her; the years of anxious waiting and search colliding against the frayed-out hope of ever find-

ing him. The room and the figure of Mr. Wu seemed to slip away from her, oscillating and wavy, as unreal as the changing lights within a theater. The time was endless before she was able to draw its forms together again. . .

Her eyelids fluttered wide and she found herself resting on a hardwood bench. Byrnes forced the lip of a brandy glass against her tightly clenched teeth. Sammy stood behind him, holding a bowl of tea in his two hands. She felt overwhelmingly exhausted, as though she had come to the end of a fantastic dream.

"David— he's in Shantung."

"Now don't get excited, young lady." Byrnes smiled.

"I'm all right." She forced herself to sit up and she was glad it was Byrnes who was here to help: Byrnes who was solid and round-shouldered, who threw off excitement and panic as a duck sheds water. "Where's that Chinese, Mr. Wu?"

"Gone. He called me in when you fainted, then took off in the excitement. Those old-timers are like that. Get frightened. They're afraid that if they help someone they're responsible for them the rest of their lives. Old China custom."

"But he's seen David—the article."

Byrnes nodded, sitting beside her. His long upper lip looked more drawn-out than ever. "I read it," he said. "Amazing story if it's true." Then, as though doubtfully reassuring her: "I think there's something to it. I'm putting one of the boys on it."

"I'm going to Shantung."

"Better pull yourself together, Adrian. Sammy will take you to the hotel while I check on the Shantung missions and see if I can find this Wu character."

Still too stunned to resist any suggestions, she went with the Chinese boy. While riding with the boy the length of the Bund and across the Garden Bridge to the Hotel New Astor where she lived, pride and a certain sense of "face" prevented her from showing either feeling or strain, but on reaching her room the mask went down. The vast store of emotion and loneliness pent up within her welled forth. She threw herself across the bed and wept; her weeping was like that of a child, the sobs convulsive, each building upon the other until there was no stopping the rush of emotion.

SHE was awakened by the persistent ringing of the cream-colored French phone at her bedside. Only after she had lifted the phone from its cradle did she notice it had grown dark outside.

"Byrnes," the voice said in her ear.

She sat up, pressing the phone to her as though it were a breathing heart, a telltale pulse. "Did you find anything?"

"Something," came the steady, phlegmatic voice. "There are, or there were, twelve missions in Shantung, and all of them doing a certain amount of medical work. It would take you a couple of months to cover them if you could get into the area, which you can't because it's partly civil war area."

"You didn't find the old man?"

"No. But he sure gets around. He's visited all the press services, papers and correspondents in town to pass out the same yarn. American consulate, too. Incidentally, the consulate wants to see you tomorrow. It appears that there's something to that Chiao yarn, rumors about a foreigner named Chiao who was a pretty fancy guerrilla fighter in Shantung. A correspondent tried to locate him some time back, but no luck. He vanished at the end of the war."

"Has there been any description?"

"Not that I can recall."

Adrian snapped the bedside lamp on. Its oblique light threw a bright circle upon the floor before her and the fringes of light reached beyond into the sitting-room of the suite, touching the old-fashioned Victorian furniture with its soft glow, The light seemed to penetrate her spirit, filling her with an expectant happiness which she still could not believe was true.

"Will you be in tomorrow?" Byrnes asked.

"It will depend."

"Want me to drop by tonight?"

Adrian hesitated. "No. I think I'd rather be alone."

After she had replaced the phone she noticed the small square of white pasteboard that had been edged under the door in the sitting-room. She went directly to the door and opened it, then suddenly took a startled step back. Mr. Wu's leathery, humorous Chinese face shone before her.

"I may come in?" he asked in his precise, rounded, schoolish English.

"Why, I—" She conquered her momentary feeling of confusion and amazement. "Please," she said, opening the door wider.

When Mr. Wu moved, his body, wrapped in its long severe black Chinese gown, showed a grace and austerity that only active, yet old men can possess. Adrian shut the door and turned to face him. Her glance caught the sparkle of his silver fingernail guards as he drew a yellowed, paper-covered book from the broad sleeve of his gown, handed it to her with a bow, then shook his own hands.

She looked at the title on the back cover. It was printed in fat squat characters not familiar to her.

"Is the *Hsi Ch'ing ku Chien* of late Emperor Ch'ien Lung," Mr. Wu explained. "Illustrated catalogue of Imperial treasures full of woodcuts and sketches. This poor example is volume ten. Other forty-two volumes of *Hsi Ch'ing* not available to public."

"Please be seated," Adrian said.

The old man's glance swiveled about the room with aimless curiosity. "I think you have friends," he murmured. "Outside, overhear voices."

"Visitors? . . . Oh, no. I was telephoning."

Mr. Wu's narrow eyes scanned the room carefully, then settled upon the telephone visible in the adjoining bedroom. He looked at her, face brightening, gold teeth glistening. "Ah, so. Modern invention often confusing."

"You've seen my husband?" Adrian asked abruptly.

"Husband?" The old man choked slightly, showing his disappointment because she had stepped into conversation so directly and without following the involved, traditional patterns for opening conversations. He was upset that he had lost the opportunity of using the *chien chia*—beauty-penetrates-gradually — style, in which one moves gently from the unimportance of weather to matters of weight.

"My husband?" Adrian repeated.

"I attain unto stupidity." Mr. Wu bowed again. His English, running the scale of Chinese intonations, was as smooth and soft as spring water.

"David—Mr. Armour is my husband. You've seen him, haven't you?"

Mr. Wu drew a yellowed, paper-covered book from the broad sleeve of his gown, and handed it to her with a bow.

THE bluntness of her questions seemed to shake the frail old man. The Tartar blood which showed in the roundness of his head and the breadth of his bronze forehead no longer contained the ancient vigor of Kublai Khan. Adrian feared that the old man might be frightened away once more.

"Ah, so. Mr. Armour, the warrior Chiao." Mr. Wu bowed low, the full kowtow given to a respected woman of the family on New Year's day. When he had shown his full respect for the woman of the warrior Chiao, he sat again. "This is so nice," he observed. "Today I make unhappy blunder not knowing wife of Mr. Armour employed at newspaper. Vast embarrassment."

"Please, Mr. Wu. My husband—" She was furious. She wanted to seize him, to shake the words from his delicate willowy body.

"Ah, so sorry please. I am unworthy to bring you excellent news. Mr. Armour recovering rapidly. Will return to Shanghai short-long time soon."

"I want to go to him. Where is the Shantung mission he's at? Which one?"

"Wait here expectantly, please."

"I've waited too much."

"Ah, understand, but it is not in design of events. Must wait. Useless to seek mission in Shantung. Husband not there."

"You said you had seen him there."

Mr. Wu appeared surprised that the location of the mission had been remembered at all. Then smiling slyly, he explained: "Mention of Shantung is slight variation of truth to be corrected in second installment of article about husband. Is necessary in this way to protect literary position of self, otherwise many reporters seek heroic Chiao and my story valueless."

"But he's *my* husband. Tell me where he is."

The old Chinese hunched his shoulders in a delicate, scholarly gesture. "Chinese can never answer exact things," he said. "Can only suggest. Westerners always very inscrutable people. Directness most bewildering."

Having delivered himself of this wisdom, the old man smiled complacently and fingered his wispy white beard while his eyes carefully searched the room again and settled upon the telephone. Good patriot that he was, he was amazed and distressed over the fact that in spite of the many centuries of Chinese civilization the best brains among his people had somehow failed to stumble across science and technology in their quest for human knowledge.

Adrian watched him curiously. She felt that any further demands on her part would strike flatly against the wall of extreme politeness and blandness he had erected. She had a furious impression that he had come here to learn something, not to explain anything. There was an implication of deviousness in his ways that puzzled her.

"You're not a journalist," she finally said.

"Journalist?" Mr. Wu fumbled with the word. "I am most important journalist. Was once scholar of classics, but when Manchu government abolish formal learning with one stroke of red brush I am faced with eating. Stomach always speaks with forceful eloquence. I therefore take up best trade. Today importance of trade is justified. All foreign-style newspapers in Shanghai purchase story."

Adrian could not help but smile at his vanity. "You write too flowery for a newsman."

"Ah, is fault of subject matter. In case of Mr. Armour I am like Ts'ao Chun, Kitchen Stove God, who journeys to Western Heaven to report doings of Chinese family to Jade Emperor on New Year. Family offers Ts'ao big pieces molasses candy so when he makes report is unable to extricate teeth and report ill-favored things. Conduct of your husband in recent war so exemplary, is candy involving self with my poor writing brush."

"You didn't come to tell me about my husband. You haven't told me a thing."

Mr. Wu looked at her directly and steadily for the first time. "Have small question," he murmured, apologetic for being so blunt. "Wish to know exactly how husband run away from you?"

For an instant, Adrian sat stiffly in her chair, the color drawing from her cheeks. "Run away—" she murmured. "He didn't run away."

"Is important, must understand event."

"We—that is, Mr. Armour was part of a commission surveying war damages to Chinese national monuments and treas-

ures. That was before America entered the war."

"Am interested in last event," Mr. Wu interrupted politely.

ADRIAN nodded, forcing the memories to take shape. "We were in Peiping," she said. "The last time I saw my husband was at lunch the day he disappeared. Following lunch he and Mr. Fitching, a Commission archeologist, went by rickshaw to view a temple outside the city. On the way they had an accident when a Japanese military truck overturned their rickshaw. Mr. Fitching said neither of them were hurt, but they did have a furious argument with the Japanese soldiers. Somewhile later, Mr. Fitching lost track of my husband. We never saw David again." She stared at Mr. Wu appealingly. "Has he said what happened?"

"Husband forgetful of activities after Peiping accident," Mr. Wu said. "Does not always remember exciting events as hero Chiao." He nodded his wise head toward the Chinese book Adrian had placed on the table. *"Hsi Ch'ing* book will help find memory. Mr. Armour important authority on ancient T'ang Bronzes. Now, other small question. What does lady wish to do with returning husband?"

"What I wish to do?"

Mr. Wu nodded. "Yes. American woman always dominate husband, I learn. Mr. Armour very important to China."

The old man's tacit query was like an unexpected knife thrust cutting deeply, laying back the flesh of an old wound that had almost healed. Until today the search for David had seemed so futile and hopeless, her longings had become numbed and mechanical. She had given little thought to how it would be when she met him once again. What would she do? Would it be the same as before, after such a bitter, helpless separation? She had let herself look so little into the future.

She rose and went to the window, gazing down at the brightly lit angle of Soochow Road and at the dark multitude of sampans and houseboats moored shoulder to shoulder along the creek bank, their somnolent shapes barely etched under the dim, hazy light cast from the Capitol theater on the opposite bank. She knew what she wanted. . . I want David to take me home, she thought. We'll go home together. I'm tired of the Orient and its dangers. . . Staring at the darkness beyond, she began to frame her own feelings clearly, things that had lain subconsciously in her. China had robbed them both of the best years of their marriage. She did not want to take the chance of that occurring again. She wanted more than just the companionship of being in new places with him. She felt a deep, restless need to surround herself with a home and children.

She turned toward Mr. Wu with an abruptness that startled the old man. "You want to know what I plan to do when my husband returns?" she said. "Very well, tell me where he is now and I'll tell you."

Mr. Wu smiled complacently. "Would not be fair exchange. Perhaps husband already coming here."

"Then you won't tell me?"

"Pu kau tang, but I am unworthy." Rising from his chair, Mr. Wu joined his hands within his long sleeves, bowed po-

...ITS QUALITY

HITS THE SPOT!

litely, then backed toward the door. "But I think you wish to rob China of valuable husband," he added.

"Wait!"

Adrian ran to the telephone and picked up the receiver. "I'm calling the police."

Mr. Wu hesitated. The expression on his face showed fleeting disappointment, a look of distress because this woman should so boldly violate all of the three-thousand accepted rules of behavior.

"Is true American woman dominant," he observed tartly. "Am forced to concede, but information must remain secret between us. Otherwise this unworthy life seeks danger."

"I won't tell anyone."

She replaced the phone on its cradle.

"Husband is being treated at Nankai University Hospital near Tientsin," said Mr. Wu.

"Will he be there long?"

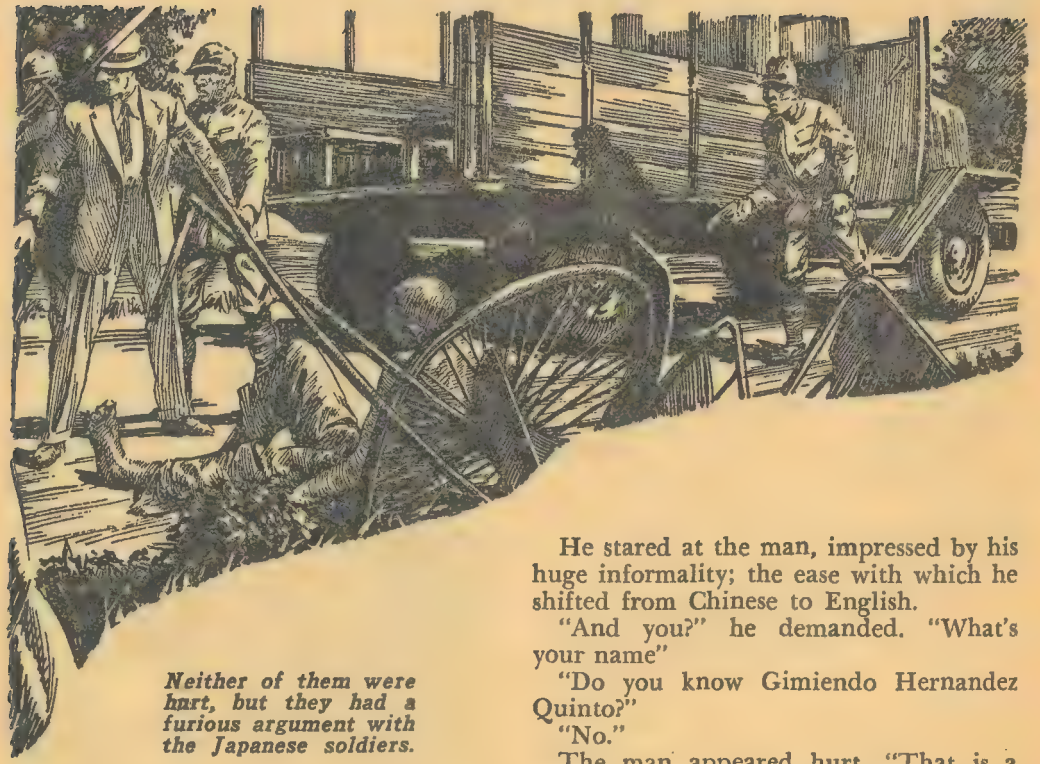
"Short-long time, perhaps two weeks."

When the old man had gone, she crossed the room and stood before the table, staring at the curious Chinese book Mr. Wu had left. Her thoughts ran ahead, mind alive with the anticipation and plans for going to meet David. Then, abruptly, a terrible realization broke through her thoughts. She remembered that Nankai University had been completely destroyed the year before David had disappeared.

CHAPTER III

CHINA HAS MANY EARS

FLESH fitted around his body tightly as he lay awake upon the *k'ang,* eyes reaching blindly through the darkness, ears pitched to the sound that had entered his room. A match suddenly flared, brightening the corner where the drum stool stood. Its yellow flicker scooped a quick restless



Neither of them were hurt, but they had a furious argument with the Japanese soldiers.

circle of light from the blackness and brought a large, serene face into its circle —the huge bronzed man who had worn the pea-green clothes. The match-glow rubbed against the darkness and, touched against the wick of an oil lamp, enlarged into a great blaze of brightness.

The big man turned his face toward the *k'ang* and David Armour. He wore an unlit, loosely rolled cigarette between lips that widened into a vague smile.

"Ni hao?"

The greeting was in National Chinese but the accent was outlandishly Mexican. It was the first time Armour had heard him speak. During the last few days Larson, the mission doctor, had talked with him but this man had been strangely absent. The doctor had even refused to speak about him.

"You say things beautifully in your sleep, Señor Armour. Many nights I listen."

He stared at the man, impressed by his huge informality; the ease with which he shifted from Chinese to English.

"And you?" he demanded. "What's your name"

"Do you know Gimiendo Hernandez Quinto?"

"No."

The man appeared hurt. "That is a sadness." He frowned at Armour. "I am now Quinto."

A few seconds' silence followed the announcement. As Armour stared at him his gaze also caught the edges of light spread by the lamp. The grotesque shades and deeper shadows seemed to accentuate the fantastic agile bulk of this man called Quinto. His thoughts filled with an unpleasant sense of something impending, something just beyond the man, something hovering in the mobile play of lights and shadows. He fought down the panic which had assailed him through these past few days of gained and desperately held clarity.

He remembered Doctor Larson's visits; the skillfully directed conversations like a series of shadows, edgeless, yet distinct, smoothly flowing, logical and unfrantic in spite of the always furious glaze in the doctor's blue eyes. The doctor saying that more than six years had withered away between his last remembered impression of the world—lunch at the Grand Hotel des Wagon-Lits in Peiping—and his awakening on this mission *k'ang*. He had learned the incredible fact that a war had

been fought and won; he in the midst of it, yet with no memory of it. Less than two months ago he had been found by Provincial partisan troops. He had been found wandering across the backroads of China, half-starved, wearing ragged Chinese clothes and chattering senselessly. "You can call it retroactive amnesia, call it anything you want," Larson had said. "It doesn't matter. You've lost six years. . ."

"You are feeling better, eh?" Quinto broke the momentary silence. He sat on the *k'ang* edge.

"A bit."

"Sta bien, you are then accustomed to being in 1946. From '41 to '46 is not many years to count up," Quinto observed sagely. "The *Señor medico* has sprinkled your memory a little. Perhaps the thoughts are taking seed."

"It is your business?"

"Si claro, it is my business. I am a citizen of China." The big man paused, looking at his hands as though weighing in them the importance of his next thoughts. He went on: "Many years ago, Señor Armour, you had a good reputation as a scholar in China. Against you, there was no suspicion then. When you dis-

"You say things beautifully in your sleep, Señor Armour. Many nights I listen."

appeared in Peiping six or seven years ago it caused much trouble. The American Government was angry with the Japanese, the Japanese argued they did not know where you went."

Armour stared steadily at the man, trying to fathom what he was getting at. He

said, "Someone must know. I don't remember, but someone must."

"Someone—but who?" Quinto asked rhetorically. He lit his cigarette, then went on. "A little after you disappeared from Peiping your country was attacked by Japan. In China there was much confusion, too. Now that it is all over there is still no one to say where you went."

"That's impossible."

"Ayi, so I think. But there is no record of what you did after Peiping. There is no Japanese Army record of you, nor Puppet Government records that we can find. The American and Chinese armies have no record that you were a war prisoner. Naturally there will be suspicions."

ARMOUR fastened his gaze on Quinto's cigarette. A few days ago the thought of tobacco revolted him. Now its tart aroma touched his hunger.

"Cigarette," he said. " You make it."

"It is Fu'ping tobacco."

"Doesn't matter."

He watched the Mexican's thick, blunt fingers deftly roll out the cigarette. When he had taken his first biting puff, he asked, "What kind of suspicions?"

"Collaboration," Quinto replied calmly. "Collaboration with the Japanese. You were not with the *guerrilleros* and partisans. I am one who would have known if you were."

"Collaboration—"

The Mexican looked enormously tolerant. *"Puede que sí, puede que no, pero lo más probable es, quien sabe?"* he murmured. "It may be so, it may not, but the most probable is—who knows? You are one who has returned from the dead and there is no gravestone to mark where you were buried or to say what has happened."

Armour looked at the man quickly. He was struck by Quinto's curious manner of using a Spanish phrase to illustrate a Chinese point-of-view. He shut his eyes for a moment. If he could only cut out Quinto he might organize his thoughts. The idea was childish, he finally realized. Each time he tried to recall the past his mind leaped back to that afternoon at the Wagon-Lits in Peiping. He stared at Quinto again, saying, "I talked in my sleep—what?"

"Ah, you embarrass me. Sometimes it is about a woman."

"Adrian?"

Quinto nodded.

"The doctor told me she's in Shanghai. Is she all right?"

"She is waiting."

"Why isn't she here? It isn't like her."

"She does not come, perhaps, because there is civil war. But she is not the only one you have spoken of in sleep."

"So?"

Quinto did not respond immediately. Instead, he left the *k'ang* and crossed to door, standing there, listening for a few minutes. When he returned he gave Armour a solemn smile, and said, "China has many ears." He sat again on the *k'ang,* big shoulders hunched forward, his voice becoming a soft somnambulistic monotone. "In your sleep you spoke of many things: of this Adrian who must be beautiful and friendly, of a green tiger whom I have never met and of some T'ang Bronzes from the Eastern Tombs."

"Eastern Tombs near Shih Men?" Armour placed the spot familiarly.

"Sí, hombre, the Imperial Manchu Tombs. That of Ch'ien Lung. You know Ch'ien?" Quinto asked it as though he might have expected him to be personally acquainted with Emperor Ch'ien Lung who had died in 1795.

"I know the place," Armour replied. "The tombs were robbed a year before I went to Peiping with the Commission. Bandit group, I recall."

Quinto flashed him an indignant glance. "Bandits—no. A partisan company led by the Tungpei fighter, Mei Tung, opened the tombs but a few hours before the Japanese thought of it. Brother Mei took away the treasures: the many valuable jades, the pearls and fine rubies and, most important, some T'ang Bronzes. Brother Mei wished to protect these national treasures for China but Mei was killed and the treasure recaptured by a Japanese patrol many months later.

"Pues, when the war came to an end the Japanese wished to get such valuable objects out of China. We have been told that the most valuable pieces, the Bronzes were packed in baskets and sent toward Shanghai. They did not reach Shanghai because the war ended too soon. Instead, they disappeared without leaving foot-

steps. Here on this *k'ang* I have heard you talking to yourself in such a way that makes me think you know where these Bronzes are hidden."

Armour had listened with cold motionless tension. The incredible revelations of the past few days had grown still more fantastic. He tried to return at least an element of frayed logic to the picture.

"Anyone would know about the tombs being robbed," he protested. "It was common knowledge in Peiping."

"*Claro,* but in your fever you have spoken of a bronze figure of Lao Tse who is riding on the back of a buffalo, and of a bronze incense urn which is decorated with *chin yin ssu* or gold and silver threadwork. These were pieces in the Emperor's collection. It was never anounced by the partisans or by the Japanese that it was Ch'ien Lung's tomb which was opened or which objects were taken." The Mexican paused, brushing his chin in a perplexed manner, then: "But, if you were one who helped the Japanese get these things from Brother Mei and helped them hide the Bronzes . . ."

Armour stared at the man helplessly. He was not so much startled by his words as lost in them. The entire situation had become furiously unreal. He felt like a person trapped in a morass of stupidity, by blunderings not of his own making.

"You understand my suspicions, yes?" Quinto asked.

He nodded gravely. "So I helped the Japanese steal Bronzes. I don't know and I don't remember. It's insane."

"There will be no cheating," Quinto frowned.

"I don't remember."

THE BIG man sighed. He left the *k'ang* and began pacing around it, meanwhile talking at Armour through the faded mosquito netting that walled one side and end of the bed.

"In China," he said, "there is a rumor that Quinto has killed many collaborators, even this late after the war. *Entonces,* I am not one to deny grains of truth. You will understand this, eh? When it is digested, perhaps you will wish to help me."

"How?"

"Your thoughts will return. The memory does not always remain blank. This I know because sometimes I forget to eat breakfast, but always I remember it, even a month later."

Armour smiled faintly, amused that this man who was no doubt an able executioner, had absorbed so much of the simplicity and whimsy of China.

"Why do you want the Bronzes?" he asked curiously.

"For China."

Armour gave him a puzzled look. "Why?" he repeated.

"It is simple," Quinto went on. "You will hear many things when you leave Feng Yang and go to Shanghai. Many of these stories are matters of opinion, *comprenez?* Since the end of the war China has more than one government. At this moment the Northern Government is discussing peaceful arrangements with the Nationalists at Nanking. You know it is always the custom during a negotiation, even in New China, to exchange presents which smooth the bargaining. It is our wish to find the Imperial Bronzes for this purpose. My *compañeros* the Old Hundred Names, the men of the soil, will make a gift to the Nationalists."

"You expect me to find them?" Armour said with a touch of irony.

"*Quien sabe?* If you remain in China, you will be very visible. Someone will come who recognizes you. When you put together your lost years we will find your missing gravestone and be able to read the writing on it and under it, maybe the T'ang Bronzes."

"And if I don't help?"

The Mexican's brown smudgy eyes swerved toward him with disquieting abruptness.

"You are in trouble, Señor Armour," he said softly. "In Shanghai the men of your government might suspect you of having helped the Japanese in the war, since they have no record of you as a prisoner."

"I'll say I was ill."

"*Si, verdad,* if they believe that, they will send you to a hospital in America. Then you will never discover what happened these years; you can only search for them in China. You will become an old man full of doubts. For you this is a sadness because you spend years looking into the past of China; you never rest until you

have explored each dark corner of history. Can you have darkness in your own history?"

He saw the man shrug despondently, the gesture of a subtle actor. The interplay of meaning in Quinto's words revealed the man as much deeper and keener than he had first appeared. The fine underplay of his tone and meaning made him not only an actor but a careful picker of men's minds.

"How many Bronzes are missing?"

"Four."

"You know which ones?"

"I will make you a description which we received from Brother Mei as he died." Quinto stopped before the flickering oil lamp, staring thoughtfully at the light that brought out the strong planes of his face. "If you help us find the Bronzes it will be a great favor to the memory of Brother Mei and his partisans, you understand, eh? His men lost much 'face' when they were careless enough to let the Japanese capture the Imperial treasures and to be killed by them. You will help them regain 'face,' I think. But there is always danger."

"Danger?"

Quinto turned toward him again, shrugging as if to say danger was something that came in normal proportions like food and drink. *"Está claro,"* he said. "I am one who is always logical: because the T'ang Bronzes do not appear even one year after the war is finished it is plain that there is someone who wishes to keep them hidden. If they think you search for it, they will wish to destroy you." He pressed a broad powerful thumb into his palm illustrating how an insect is crushed. *"Entonces, hombre,* it is the price you might pay for digging up your past . . . The archeology of deceit is always more dangerous than the archeology of history."

CHAPTER IV

THE BRONZES OF T'ANG

THE STILLNESS of the train, stalled since Armour had boarded it at Chinkiang, annoyed and oppressed him. It filled him with the need of movement to release the restless tensions building up within him. Quinto had warned him to be alert now that he was on his way to Shanghai. Unaccustomed to seeking danger, unversed in gauging its measurement and hidden forms, he had searched for it behind each passing second, and with the exhaustive intentness of an interne-doctor studying symptoms.

He glanced at the two Chinese businessmen who shared the compartment with him. Their black-gowned bodies were lost in the shadows of the darkened compartment. Only their faces showed, somewhat luminous, bland and round. They spoke in low, fluttering tones that moved like the murmur of a stream winding beneath moonlight. When he had first entered the compartment an hour ago they had looked at the somewhat threadbare, black clerical-cut suit he wore—clothes loaned by the Feng Yang mission doctor. They must have taken him for a missionary, for they regarded him with a momentary benevolent sympathy, the look one gives to a man who has entered a contest a few thousand years too late.

From beyond the compartment's blackness he heard the mournful wail of locomotives. The sound scaled above the cries of nocturnal street-hawkers and the constant shuffling and chattering of people on the station platform beneath his window. Restlessly, he made himself a cigarette then turned and raised the tattered window shade.

A flood of moonlight reached across the station-square illuminating the milling groups of people, the soldiers, the farmers, the street-vendors who sold fantastically-priced foods beneath the added glare of acetylene flares. Beyond the square the moonlight heightened the lunar drama of a war-shattered building where snapped beams poked up forlornly in the clear night.

He wondered which nation had crushed that building? In the past few days his awareness to the world outside himself had been sharply reawakened. He was more and more stunned with the fact that the violent stages of war had been fought and won around him, yet he had to learn its details as though he were a child reading it from a book. It annoyed him that nothing, not even these shattered buildings, stirred his mind. The thought that six faceless years might be irrevocably

blotted from his life constantly tortured him. At each turn in the search of his memory he found himself staring at a blank, formless wall, like the ornamental *Hua ch'iang* wall in a Chinese garden with its plain whitewashed surface inviting guests to dash off a picture or poem upon it. He smiled wryly—no one had written on his wall; perhaps no one would. He wondered if there was any real hope of probing his past? The desire simply to go ahead into the future with Adrian worked upon him strongly.

He recalled Quinto's suspicions about Adrian—that she might want him to leave China. Although he was sure she wouldn't want to leave, the deeply gnawing desire to be with her once more, to know what had happened to her, overshadowed all his thoughts and the Mexican's doubts. How would she feel toward him? Thinking this, somehow frightened him. He realized that for Adrian, six years stood between them: for him, the memory was as it had been in Peiping, unchanged, nothing standing between them except the unsubstantial images Quinto had put in his mind.

As he stared absently at the station platform he was startled by a face suddenly appearing at the window. A face that peered in, attempting to fathom the compartment's darkness. He sat stiffly and watched the intent features. The man outside seemed not to see him. His round, saucer-flat Cantonese face, shaded by a western-style golf cap, appeared to hover at the window frame, staring in with an idiotic passivity. For a second Armour experienced an odd, uncertain feeling of recognition that slipped through his memory with exasperating elusiveness.

ONE OF THE businessmen facing Armour abruptly pulled down the window shade.

"The country one shows bad *t'su*. The untutored behavior of his father shows." The Chinese bowed and smiled apologetically toward Armour.

"It doesn't matter."

Excitement quickened in him as he left the compartment and hurried down the dimly lit corridor to the platform. He stood on the car steps, scanning the noisy amorphous mass of train-watchers, a mass which steadily enlarged as the train delayed, growing like a nightmare fungus enveloping the entire station platform. There was no sign of the man in the golf cap.

His round, saucer-flat Cantonese face appeared to hover at the window frame.

Behind him, a voice said, *"Pu yao chi,* don't be impatient."

He turned and saw the blue-clad carboy grinning at him.

"Train wait for soldier escort," the boy volunteered. "Maybe trouble by Wushih."

"Fighting?"

"Old Hundred Name people look for rice. Always hungry."

"When do we go?"

"Yes and no."

"What time is it?"

The boy thrust forth his arm, exhibiting a Japanese watch strapped to his wrist. It read, one o'clock.

We'll never get to Shanghai at this rate, Armour thought. He went to the platform and picked his way through the surging mass of humanity, eyes alert and searching as he made the circuit of the station-square. The odor of garlic and the strange unidentifiable smells of the Orient assailed him from every side.

He saw the saucer-faced Cantonese again. The man was half lost in a group that had gathered to watch a noisy "know-characters" game. At first Armour saw only his cap and half his face, yet it

was tantalizingly familiar. It was like a word balancing upon the tip of one's tongue, a word desperately needed for the joining of a sentence, a word that remained an inarticulate taunt upon the edge of memory. It puzzled him because the feeling of familiarity left no other impact upon him, no sense of danger, no taste of friendship. Its complete negativeness irritated him as all unidentified and uncatalogued things annoyed him and moved him to action.

He began shouldering his way through the crowd and toward the man. All at once that flat-saucer face looked directly at him. Recognition flashed in the dark southern eyes as the man turned, jamming his way out of the group until he had broken free and was running toward the dark perimeter of the station area. Armour caught a momentary glimpse of the man's figure—the golf cap, his quilted work jacket and below that the almost comic plaid golf-knickers.

He returned to the train. The two Chinese in his compartment seemed to be sleeping. He sat facing the window until, without warning, the train moved forward. He had almost forgotten it possessed wheels. Upon the platform and trackway outside there was a wide flurry of excitement as ticketless peasants and shouting boys—the roving orphans of China—tried to clamber aboard the moving carriages. Train guards beat them back with sticks and chased agile boys along the track, thrashing them unmercifully, raising clouds of dust and lice from padded jackets. And all the while, the pursuer and the pursued roared with laughter.

Armour leaned back with a sigh. He watched the windows reflectively, scarcely noticing the swift rush of darkness beyond them. Only now and then an occasional light, looming toward the window like an eye searching in, then falling away steadily, gave a feeling of motion in the night.

His encounter with the saucer-faced man still unnerved him. He snapped the compartment light on, hoping it would wake the Chinese. Neither stirred. He made a cigarette and smoking it, watched the gentle swaying motion of the two opposite him. Beneath the drab nakedness of the overhead bulb the silence in the compartment seemed to rub coarsely against him, drawing his nerves apart. It was like the awakening of a suspicion within a man; the alert waiting for a figure that steps out of an alleyway on a sultry night. Beyond this, like an overtone of mounting hysteria, came the steady clicking of train wheels, the agonized creaking from the frame of the coach and the dry rustling of the tattered window shade.

HE TRIED TO shake off the feeling of oppression by thinking of Adrian. He wanted to picture her sitting with friends at tea, perhaps at the Astor or the Shanghai Jockey Club; but it was as if each motion of the train threw the picture out of focus and each time another image slid into its place, pictures cutting him off from the whole of his life, pictures of Feng Yang Mission, of Quinto with the pistol and the jade chopsticks thrust in his pockets. With a feeling of uncertainty he looked back over the past week.

The hard, exhausting trek on tiny native ponies across the hills and the great lake region of Kiangsu Province was forever burned into his mind and body. When they had come within sight of Chinkiang and the Nanking-Shanghai railroad Quinto and his two partisan soldiers had halted. "Here, Señor Armour, you must go alone," he had said. "When you visit your American Consul in Shanghai remember the little history of your life I give you. Your Consul is one who has memorized it. If you change one word you will confuse him."

Fact of fiction, the story which Quinto had devised for him to account for his lost six years so that he would not arouse too much official suspicion in Shanghai, contained an element of the incredible. He was to masquerade as a foreign guerrilla fighter who had lived under the Chinese name of Chiao, who had been injured at the close of the war and unable to reach the outside.

"Was there a Chiao?" he had asked.

"Si, compañero."

"A foreigner?

Quinto had shrugged and shown his facile smile, saying, "Who knows? It is only important that you do not change the history."

Now, within the bleakness of the com-

partment he remembered one more thing and touched the pocket of his ministerial coat. He pulled out a folded paper and a small blue-white porcelain amulet, the figurine of a rabbit seated on its hind legs, body stiff, face gazing upward. The amulet had been the only unexplainable possession he had had upon him when the partisans had brought him to Feng Yang. Quinto had given it back upon parting.

"It is a very small and unimportant toy," Quinto had observed. "But someday, perhaps, it will grow large if you think over it. I have looked at it twenty days and I am still thinking of rabbits. Maybe you will have more time, yes?"

Armour turned the figure beneath the light, staring at it. It had no meaning that he could fathom; nothing more than it meant to most Chinese. There were thousands of figures similar to this, most of them in clay, all of them rabbits supposedly gazing at the moon. The Chinese believed that among the citizens of the moon there is a rabbit who passes a useful existence pounding drugs of immortality in an immense mortar. He looked at the ideograph characters marked on the base of the amulet. These, too, had no special meaning. They were written in the very ancient classical script of the scholars, the *wen-li* which is read, not spoken.

He slipped the figurine back into his pocket and unfolded the paper Quinto had given him, gazing at the neat, squarish English script:

BRONZES OF T'ANG

(1) T'ang mirror, 9 ts'un in width. Silvered bronze with gray patina. Back design in low relief, an embossed dragon in movement, frivolously chasing jewels in the midst of scrolled clouds. The jewels are 14 emeralds and six rubies

(2) T'ang figure of philosopher Lao Tse on back of water buffalo which has delicate, deer-like legs. Figure is 7 ts'un high, the casting is paper thin, patina shows warm golden glow.

(3) T'ang incense burner, 1 ch'ih 8 ts'un high. Three-leg pedestal and figure of Lung Ma—dragon horse with inscriptions describing history of the Immortal Lu Pan and his wife, Cloud. Velvet black patina.

(4) T'ang Chueh or wine-pouring vessel, 11 ts'un high, with graceful spout and loop handle. Deep cutting on surface, gold and silver threadwork inlay followed by gilding. A rubbed vessel with the splendor of porcelain.

He folded the paper thoughtfully and tried to suppress the welling up of interest and excitement the vision of ancient Chinese handicrafts and art objects always kindled in him. The descriptions Quinto had given him seemed almost too detailed, too complete. It was almost as if, while reading them, something in his mind had gone beyond, filling in shades and shapes, inscriptions and patina, not described in the paper; it was as if he had a disturbing memory of these pieces.

NOISY movement within the compartment jarred him from the restless sleep that had come to him shortly before dawn. The train had stopped. He saw the two Chinese businessmen gathering their bundles together.

"Shanghai?" he asked them.

"Soochow."

He followed the two men from the train and went to the station where he filed a telegram to Adrian, explaining that he was coming and that the train was delayed. Not knowing her address, he sent it to the Consulate in Shanghai. When he returned to the train he found the car-boy helping another Chinese passenger in his compartment. There was tremendous enthusiasm and commotion until the man's reed basket had been settled and the boy withdrew.

Armour nodded to the other, murmuring the polite, *"Ni hao."*

He found himself staring curiously at the man. The latter was a small, plump, worldly-looking Chinese, handsomely dressed in a meticulous lake silk gown. His black satin vest was held together with coral buttons. From beneath his gown the tips of black patent-leather shoes showed. Upon his head, centered as though measured off by a vernier caliper, sat a pearl gray Homburg with stiff, gently curving brim. A tiny paper flag, the French *tricolore* was stuck in the hat band.

The man's round, lemon-yellow face glowed with feeling and abundant good humor as he busied himself untying the ribbons fastening the lid of his reed basket. He reminded Armour of a modernized version of the philosopher Lao Tse, that jovial, anarchistic atheist who became the head of one of China's great religions without knowing it. Lifting the lid of the

basket, the Chinese kept up a steady stream of fluttery *kuo-yu* conversation with himself, which he sprinkled with precise French phrases.

His fat, well-manicured hands lifted a huge purring black cat from the basket to his lap.

"Voilà, Albertine, tu pauvre petite." He glanced at Armour, eyes twinkling delightedly, and asked. *"Pu p'a,* you are not afraid."

Armour smiled back reassuringly.

The Chinese stroked the cat gently. *"Alors,* Albertine, now you may look at Monsieur Armour. But remember, *fais échanger la politesse.* You may look a little, but do not stare too long. Perhaps we will see much of Monsieur, *n'est-ce pas?"*

CHAPTER V

DEATH IS NOTHING AT ALL

ARMOUR raised his glance abruptly from the black cat to the Chinese who had used his name so casually and easily.

"I am Chen Li Fu," the Chinese introduced himself with a touch of humor in his voice, and in English that was round and fluent, though glazed with the liquid flavor of French. He dug for the inevitable personal calling card and seemed surprised when he produced a handful of assorted cards from within his gown. He flipped through them until he found one that seemed satisfactory. He handed it to Armour, saying, "The cards are such a nuisance, *n'est-ce pas?* In China we have so many names, but mind you, each one our rightful name, each one appropriate for a set condition. Now do not smile, Monsieur. You see, my milk-name was Small Jade. My book-name for school was Inquisitive Dragon, later my style-name was Jake Peak, my *hao* or courtesy name is Pai Mi or White Silk. The cost of printing is gargantuan."

Armour felt stunned by the man's enthusiasm and lack of Chinese formality. His jovial ease marked him as one accustomed to dealing with foreigners in China.

"Have I ever met you?" Armour said.

"But no."

"You know me, though?"

"I know you, *certainement.* Who does not know you in Shanghai and Nanking? Who does not know Monsieur Armour—the scholar warrior. In all the papers, you understand. And your picture, of course. *Quelle histoire!* Even Albertine is anxious to meet you."

Armour looked at the cat again. It had leaped to M. Chen's shoulders, crouching there, purring softly. The cat watched intently.

"You are impressed with Albertine," Chen observed, chuckling warmly. "She is the soul of China, I tell you. But she is lady of means from Macao: her mother was Chinese, her father a Portuguese from some ship, *on puis dire.* An Eurasian, you see. However, you must pretend that this I tell you of her parentage is admirable. She is very sensitive; an elegant brute, a total brute, I tell you."

Armour stared at the cat. Albertine blinked back without sharing in the jovial vehemence of her master. She was one of those amazing Oriental felines, as black and lustrous as night, a sinuous, monumental, brutal cat. She had a large, long-nosed head, shimmering slant eyes and a thin lashing tail that was constantly in motion. In the subdued morning light her muscles seemed to play strongly beneath her pelt and her skin fitted better than the skin of her softer, stuff-shirt English sisters.

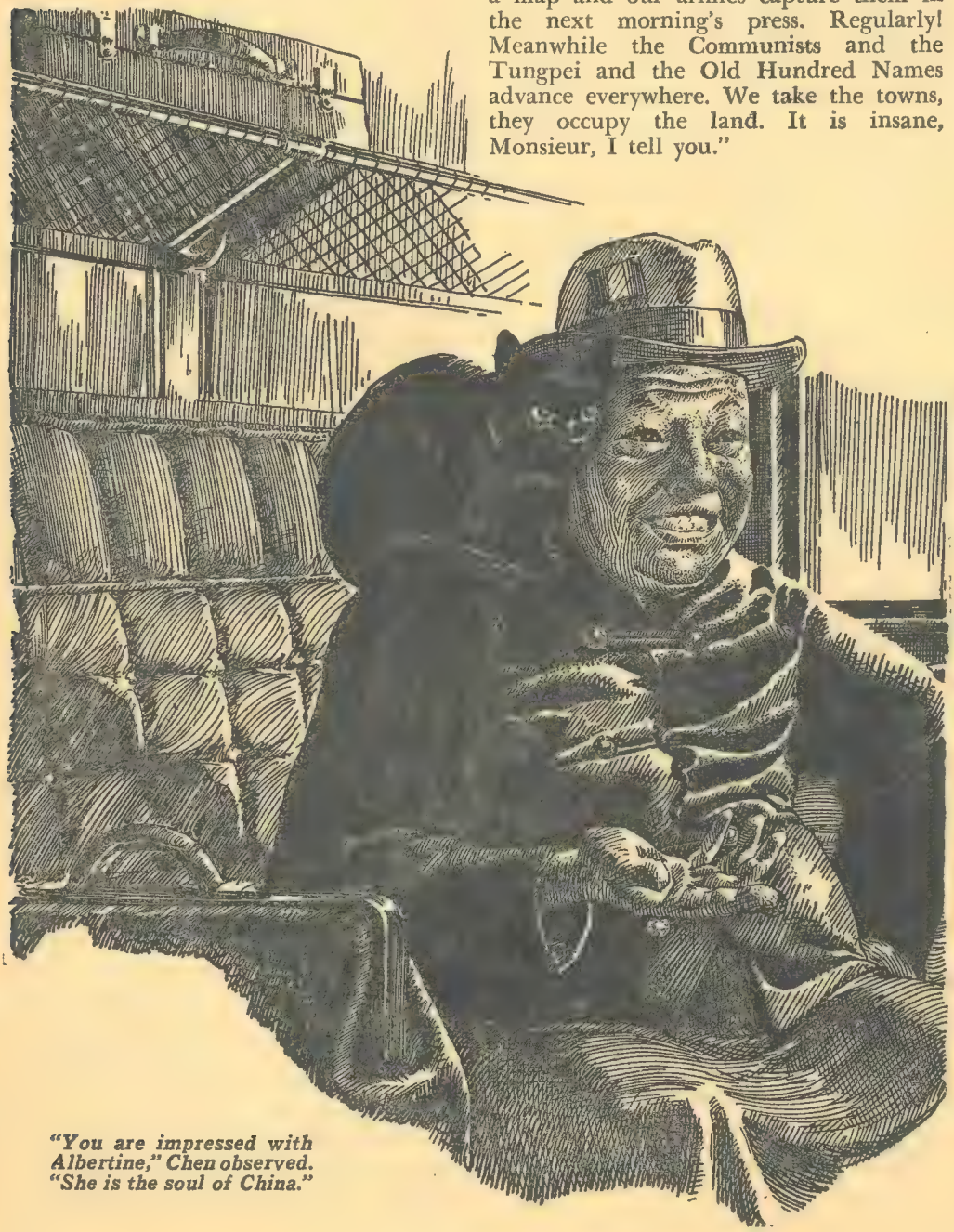
He felt unnerved watching the beast and he tried to release his gaze from the mesmeric stare the cat had fixed upon him. He forced his glance down the card in his hand, reading, "M. Chen—Export & Import."

"Your business," he asked.

"Jasmine now," M. Chen said. "Yesterday something else; tomorrow, I do not know. The restrictions, the black market, *n'est-ce pas?* Since the war private shipping is delayed even now. The Government does not act on import licenses until after lunch and the afternoon is always short. Our Customs Administration uses the black market prices as a basis for calculating duty—" He raised his shoulders in a morose shrug and chuckled again. Then leaning forward, touching Armour's knee, confidential: "Shanghai, you remember Shanghai. It is not the Shanghai you remember today. Shanghai is Marseille, it is Istanbul, it is Kobe. *Voilà"*

He straightened himself triumphantly and winked at Armour.

"The government, I tell you, walks a tightrope *diplomatique.*" M. Chen covered his eyes dramatically with one hand as though acting for a much larger, yet invisible audience. "Hear no evil, see no evil—lamentable, is it not? The press is rigidly controlled and"—he whispered this — "each night in Nanking, I have heard it on the best authority, unimpeachable; each night the Minister of War shuts his eyes and selects five towns at random from a map and our armies capture them in the next morning's press. Regularly! Meanwhile the Communists and the Tungpei and the Old Hundred Names advance everywhere. We take the towns, they occupy the land. It is insane, Monsieur, I tell you."



"You are impressed with Albertine," Chen observed. "She is the soul of China."

ARMOUR remained silent and amazed. He felt as though he were being buffeted about in a raging gale of vehement, chuckling speech. He realized he had been staring somewhat foolishly at the man's glowing cherubic face, the skin that was clear and transparent like amber-tinted gelatin. He looked toward the window and was aware for the first time that the train was rolling through the peaceful, conventional monotony of rural China. He noticed the block-houses and watch towers that showed along the track at intervals, fortifications which he knew from experiences in North China had been erected by the Japanese to protect the trackway from armed partisans. The watch towers were still occupied. Beyond these the landscape stretched out serenely; series after series of sodden, irrigated farm patches and rice paddies intersected by low muffin-shaped hills.

"May I invite you to tea?" M. Chen asked.

He looked from the window questioningly. Chen had already rung for the car-boy.

"Thanks," Armour said.

"What do you plan in Shanghai, Monsieur?"

"I'm not certain."

"You have the friends, *des amis, là bas?*"

"My wife."

"Ah, she was not with you during the fighting?"

"I understand she was a prisoner of the Japanese. I'm not sure, though."

The joviality faded from M. Chen's face for an instant. He became sympathetic. "Ah, it explains so much," he sighed. "In Shanghai we wondered why a man with your learning and delicacy should become a soldier. You do not seem the type to soldier for adventure."

The car-boy appeared with hot towels and two bowls of tea. Armour cleaned his face with the moist towel. M. Chen meanwhile had dug into Albertine's basket and produced two olive-drab sealed tins. He gave one to Armour.

"The biscuit inside is excellent."

Armour examined the can curiously; there was no label on it, only a line or two of printed information on the metal end—*US ARMY FIELD RATION C, B-UNIT. SAVE KEY TO OPEN M-UNIT.* He wondered vaguely what the M-Unit might be. Even the ways of food had changed in China, he thought. To get taste from the biscuit he had to mash it in his tea.

"In which part of China did you work during the fighting? Was it like this?" M. Chen waved his hand toward the window.

"Shantung."

"Incroyable, vraiment!" The Chinese bent and murmured to the cat, "You hear, Albertine. A man of taste and culture who buried himself among the peasants. The hardships, was it not difficult?"

"There's something of the peasant in all Americans," Armour replied tartly.

M. Chen frowned, then his face brightened swiftly. "I am so stupid," he said theatrically. "And I forget you were wounded. I tire you then with this foolishness. The wound—it is better?"

Armour's lids narrowed as he stared at the Chinese. The wound? Then it became clear and he wanted to laugh aloud. That last day at Feng Yang he had cautiously doubted Quinto's grave announcement that Shanghai would believe the Chiao story; that he, as the guerrilla fighter Chiao, had been injured at the end of the war and had lain feverish and delirious in the back-country, unable to communicate with the outside. Shanghai not only seemed to believe it; Shanghai was telling him his own story.

"Where did you hear of my being wounded?" he asked.

"It was in the papers," M. Chen replied. "But I am interested, intensely interested, I tell you. You are still suffering, naturally. We must do something for it; modern medicine, you know. I have just the place. Highest recommendations. I shall give you the address of a sanitarium in Switzerland. They set an excellent table, I swear, I have eaten there." He leaned forward. "Highest recommendation, guaranteed to get your health back. And your wife can accompany you. Even Albertine takes my word for it."

STILL UPON the man's shoulder, the huge black cat lashed her tail. Her four feet joined upon an area the size of a quarter, she arched and stood stiff-legged, her flank rubbing the Chinese man's ear, tilting his hat ludicrously. She leaped to Armour's side of the compartment and casually sniffed his tea bowl.

Armour glanced back at M. Chen who carefully straightened his hat. He tried to fathom the Chinese. The man had set his nerves on edge, first with his breathless, completely passionate monologues and now with his chuckling advice. He studied the man through half shut eyes. M. Chen seemed slightly mad. All this edge of the world was mad—but it could be a crafty kind of madness.

Hat set evenly, M. Chen sighed. "I will see you in Shanghai, *n'est-ce pas?* Where do you stay? The Cathay?"

Armour raised his guard almost instinctively. He had begun to feel that the volatile joviality of M. Chen was a mask. It had been worn well, but was now beginning to slip.

"I don't know," he said. "Why?"

"Alors, it is my passion," the Chinese replied with a touch of humor. "I feel responsible for you. You have given your years for China. Now we must repay. You hear that, repay."

"You needn't."

"If you go to America—"

"I haven't decided."

"But you must rest and play for a moment before continuing your scientific work, *n'est-ce pas? Il faut mêler á la sagesse un grain de folie.* If you leave for America I can possibly offer you a commission. A little affair in New York, I tell you. You may put it aside in a few days, yet it will give you a good income."

Armour tried to remain relaxed and indifferent, hiding the quick surge of interest and excitement that was mounting within him.

"What is it?" he asked steadily.

M. Chen appeared elated. "High class merchant's goods," he chuckled. "Jasmine and Yunnan spices. I look for someone with respect for Chinese products and, of course, with your reputation. Clever American-style advertising, I tell you. But always most proper. It is a proposition I would only offer General MacArthur. Unhappily, he is not available. A most busy man."

Armour smiled slightly. Chen's offer, made to a complete stranger, made it seem as if the Chinese were anxious to get him out of the country. Yet there was something wrong in it, something not quite in harmony with the ways of doing things in China. Armour's long experience in the country forced him to doubt the obvious logic in M. Chen's offer. For him, China was a land of counter-balances; its people thinking in terms of compensation, the efficacious interaction of Yang and Yin, of force and weakness, of dark and light. Everything was done by compromise and delicate adjustment; nothing was done bluntly and directly except when the very final channels of compromise ran dry.

He sounded M. Chen out, saying, casually, "When would I have to be in New York?"

The Chinese shrugged. "Time is of no importance," he said. "However, soon would be better. There is competition among exporters. If you would leave this week—"

Armour shook his head. "I'll think it over," he replied.

M. Chen sat back, his plump gown-incased body shaking with the movement of the train. He nodded agreeably and a soft pleasant laugh bubbled from his lips. The laughter annoyed Armour.

Still confused and amazed by the odd, worldy Chinese, Armour fell silent. He turned his glance toward the window, letting it become involved with the sunlight beyond. The land was bathed by that marvelous delphinian blue of the Kiangsu sky. In the distance he saw people fishing with nets in village ponds; men squatting on bare haunches in fields, manuring the earth. Their bent backs and their gestures and movements had a timeless anonymity. Everywhere the brown and bronzed torsos of peasants bent over unending tasks, showing no individuality, seen and forgotten; everywhere the anonymous grave mounds usurping valuable squares of soil. The wry thought entered Armour's mind that this monotonous absence of individuality of rural China mocked his own desire to peel back the skin of oblivion that hid his lost years.

It made his desire seem small, futile and unimportant. There in the fields millions of lives, each with its personal and intimate history, was being forgotten each hour. History was the greatest of all amnesiacs.

BEFORE noon the train cut across the Yangtse delta, crossed canals lined with willows and fruit trees. On the outskirts of Shanghai it broke its speed, then come to a rumbling halt. Monsieur Chen raised the curtain on the passageway side and peered out.

"Chapei," he announced. "Here they leave off the military guard. It makes a better impression to arrive in the city itself without too many soldiers. *C'est drôle, n'est-ce pas?*"

Armour watched the American-equipped Chinese troops in their mustard yellow, padded, cotton uniforms file from the train. Even these were a new kind of soldier for China. It made him feel like a stranger returning to China after a long absence; a stranger who looked for the parasol-carrying infantryman, the soldier with a bamboo fan thrust in his belt like a saber.

The train moved once more and he watched M. Chen capture his cat and return it to the basket. The man kept up a running conversation, *tutoyering* the beast as though she were his favorite concubine. Then he dusted his gray Homburg with a small whiskbroom, all the while humming a French military march—*La Sambre*. The hat dusted, M. Chen sat back and settled his happy gaze on Armour once more.

"I will see you, then, today in town?" he asked. "You have told me your hotel?"

(Continued on page 146)

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFER

By
FRANK
BONHAM

DURING that last year, only Bill Underhill knew that a sentence had been passed on him. His friends realized he was a little near-sighted, given to spilling food on his vest and signing his name aslant, but after all he was sixty-five years old and too stubborn to wear spectacles. If there had been anything

A gun roared and a smaller-caliber revolver cracked twice in its echo.

seriously wrong with his eyesight, they knew, he couldn't have handled a stage team the way he did.

They forgot that a real reinsman drove more with his mind than his eyes, that he gave his horses credit for knowing when to make a turn, if they weren't forever being hauled around so that they lost all their initiative. And of course Bill was acquainted with every ant-track on that Tucson to Iron Pipe run.

But Bill's eyes knew. They knew the sun was going down.

He would finish the drive with his eyes scalded by the desert sun. He would walk into the stage office and take an inordinate

length of time drawing off his gloves. When the darkness began to break up into objects, he would cross the room and lay the way-pouch on the agent's desk.

"Any trouble, Bill?" Earl Clum, the division agent, would ask.

"Just a nice, easy drive," Bill would say, athough occasionally there would be an arrow or two stuck in the splintered sheering of the stagecoach, and once there had been an arrow stuck in Bill.

Three days a week, Bill Underhill drove the stage from Tucson down to Iron Pipe. He laid over that night and brought the stage from the east up the next day. George Crane made the run on alternate days. Their stages would pass somewhere near Cochise station. It was a vigorous and often exciting life—Apaches, like dogs, being overfond of chasing stagecoaches, and much better equipped for the work.

It was a trade that called for skilled, courageous men, and it paid well. But every driver from San Francisco to St. Louis knew the summer of staging was past. In a few years, the old roads would have been lost.

This was the time when the railroad was striding across the Yuma Desert toward Tucson. For twenty-five years, the stagecoach had been the only means of crossing the Seven Deserts. It had been rough on passengers; it had not always been reliable. But there was a society of men who believed it was more honorable to be shot from the deck of a Concord coach than to travel in the safety of a Southern Pacific parlor car.

Bill Underhill was one of these. Each time he climbed the dusty yellow spokes to the box, he prayed: *Lord, only let me finish the drive!* Maybe the Lord didn't hear him. He was a headstrong man, intemperate about whiskey and swearing. At any rate, the cataracts before his eyes continued to thicken until he seemed to see the world through steamy spectacles.

On a crisp winter afternoon he strode into the stage office and saw the lamp as a bleached candle-flame against the wall. He stood by the door, his whip coiled over his sholder. He went through the interminable ceremony of pulling off his gloves. Bill was a long, spare old man with a face like a rutted prairie. His eyes kept reaching into the gloom, groping like a hand in the dark.

Clum's voice spoke impatiently. "Let's have that way-pouch, Bill. I've got some mail for Fort Yuma."

It was the first time Bill had had to rely entirely on his memory of the room's geography. He knew it was exactly eight steps across the office. He set out. Midway, he came up hard against someone. It threw him off-balance. He muttered an apology, and again he started off. But now he was lost; his compass was spinning. His knees struck something, painfully, and in the next moment he fell over the stove.

Clum laughed. "What's the matter with you, Bill? Been partakin'?"

Bill got to his feet, but it wasn't until Clum saw his face that he knew anything was wrong. He came quickly around his desk. "Bill, are you sick?"

Bill let them lead him to a chair. "I'm all right," he said. "Only . . . only the sun's gone down."

THERE was a room off the stage barn where he and George Crane slept on their nights in Tucson. Clum told him to regard it as home. He put another cot in, and the next afternoon George came in from his drive while Bill lay there with his arm across his eyes. George sat beside him, saying nothing, but Bill heard him pouring from a bottle. He took a deep breath and relaxed.

He had anticipated his pity like a dog awaiting a whipping. He was relieved to discover George had more sense than he had ever betrayed. You couldn't judge a man entirely by the way he handled a team. He supposed some people would consider George a good driver. But who couldn't look good with his team harnessed tighter than a woman in a Sunday corset?

George put the glass in Bill's hand. Bill glimpsed him as a blurred figure with a Mormon Stetson shoved back on his head. "Alkali in your eyes," said George. He was younger than Bill by a few years, stout where Bill was lean, gray where he was bald.

"Earl's got to do something about that barranca at Picture Rock," he said. "It'd be cheaper in the long run to fix it than to pay for a couple of broken necks."

"And if he don't get rid of that Chinese cook at Iron Pipe," said Bill, "they're go-

ing to start calling this the Ptomaine Division."

"I'll be blessed," George declared, "if that so-called driver from Stein's didn't forget to dope the axles again! Lucky I checked. You want to look out for him when you get back on the job."

"Always have," Bill said.

It set a pattern. They never acknowledged he was finished. It was always, "when you get back." Mere blindness, Bill could have accepted. But not the indignity of being retired so near the end. He nursed a conviction that in the summer, when the sun was stronger and the days longer, he would be able to drive again.

Then the railroad came, dumped on the town a few-score hulking men in bib overalls who talked of hogs, four-four-oh's and highballs, instead of Concords, and stretched itself through the mountain passes toward El Paso. Before long, the stage was operating on a weekly schedule. Then, suddenly, only the feeder lines remained, clinging to the dead stalk of the stage trail like the withered tendrils of a gourd-vine. At last there was only the Iron Pipe run. Once a week, George tooled the stage eastward into the crumbled desert hills; the same evening, he brought it back with a few letters and a passenger or two.

That night in July, he was early. He and Bill re-fought the battle of how to run a stagecoach, and retired. It was very late when Bill awoke. His hearing had become almost troublesomely acute. This time it had shaken him out of sleep to report that the room was too quiet. There was not a sound from George's cot. Bill bounded out of bed with the panicky thought that he had died in his sleep. But the bed was empty. The cotton blankets were cold.

Bill touched the hands of his clock, from which he had removed the glass. Three-twenty. He returned to bed. When George came in, a smudge of light grayed the window. But Bill said nothing.

He was silent the next night, also, when he heard George creep out of bed and depart. It was after ten. This happened twice more. About this time Bill discovered the new odor. He traced it to George's clothes. It made his skin crawl, brought the blood singing into his ears. The night following, as George was leaving, he said dryly, "Where you going?"

George made a faint gasping sound. "Where would I be going?" he countered.

"For eight hours? You ought to see a doctor."

The cot squeaked under George as he sat down. "I've got a job, Bill. Night watchman."

"Where do you work,"

He heard the other's palms rubbing his thighs. "Listen, Bill. You've got to be realistic about these things. One of these days Earl's going to let me go. When he does, I've still got to eat."

Bill sat up, a skinny inquisitor with burning eyes. "Quit stalling! You're working for the railroad. I've smelled it on you for days—grease! Damned, stinking railroad grease!"

"Now, Bill—" George said, with curt reproof. "It's just a stopgap. What happened to you set me to thinking. I'll never have enough to retire on, working one day a week. I was talking to a drummer for a saloon-fixture outfit. For three thousand down, I could build a saloon."

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"Catering," Bill inquired, "to the railroad trade?"

George did not answer immediately. In his way, he was a pretty substantial staging man, himself. "Catering," he said, "to anybody that wants a drink. It's my old-age plan. The stagecoach days are finished. We may as well admit it."

Bill was experiencing the futile rebellion of the blind. He said, with slow malevolence, "Of all the real staging men in the Territory, it had to be a mule-skinner who got to finish the drive."

"We've got our own ways of driving," George retorted. "But I've always brought my coach in, and I never yet cut a spindle or lost a passenger. I've thought I wasn't too bad a driver."

"Whatever you've thought, they couldn't have dragged you within a mile of a railroad yard if you had any right driving anything but a jackass." He swung his legs over the side of the cot. He pulled on his trousers, boots and shirt, and began chucking articles into a cowhide grip.

"This," George said, "is damned foolishness."

Bill snapped the bag shut and yanked open the door. "Who you work for is your business," he said. "But who I bunk with is mine." He left the stage barn.

That night he took a room at a second-rate hotel off the plaza.

BILL was left to the beery comradeship of the Aztec Saloon. Half his pleasure in life had been grousing about the way George handled a team. Now, he saw in his cup only a murky residue of train whistles and remorse. Earl Clum came into the saloon one day when the sun was a yellow monster, intimidating the lizards, spawning moss in the horse-troughs, filling the saloons with thirsty men.

"Just heard something that might interest you," he remarked. "Stan Rydings has opened a new harness store. He needs a handy-man. I told him to hold it until I talked to you."

"I don't need a job," Bill grunted. "I've got enough money for as long as I'll be around."

Clum sprinkled salt in his beer. "You may be around longer than you think. Why don't you invest?"

"In what?"

Clum frowned at the expiring suds. "Saloons are always good. Look around you. . . . Men can go without clothes or food, but they've got to have whiskey."

Bill's bloodshot eyes turned up to the division agent. "You tell George he can go to hell."

"This was my own idea, Bill. If you don't like it, all right. But you and he could cut a swath, with all the friends you've got."

"Sure. We've got hundreds," Bill said. "Only most of them are dead. Apaches and old age."

"Reminds me—" Clum chuckled. "A bunch of Natchez bucks tried to stop an S.P. train yesterday. Took six trainmen to move the rock they'd put on the tracks, while the passengers stood the 'Paches off and the engineer doused them with live steam when they rode past!"

Bill did not see the humor of it. "That don't sound good for George. They're going to be mighty peckish for a while."

Clum cleared his throat, opened his mouth twice, and finally said softly, "I don't think George needs to worry much, Bill. The company's been losing money on that line for months. Tomorrow will be the last time he takes it out."

The end of a world does not always call for thunder and lightning. Sometimes, like Bill's, it sputters out like a match tossed into a gutter.

"I'd always hoped," Clum was saying, "that you would bring the last stage in, Bill. George is a good man; but when you sort those lines, when you let that old whip whisper in the wheelers' ears—"

It was the worst thing he could have said. It kindled a fire in an old man's heart, where there should have been ashes. Bill was on his feet. "Damn you, Earl!" he said. "I *am* going to drive that stage!"

The agent swallowed. "I—I ain't sure I get you, Bill—"

Bill extended his arms, his hands gripping air, the knuckles up. "*There's* where the work's done! Not with my eyes. When those horses know who's on the box, there won't be any geein' and hawin' needed. I *see* with these hands, Earl!"

Clum sounded desperate. "I couldn't do it—my God, there'll be passengers! What if you had trouble? I'd have to put my eyeballs in hock to pay the damage suit."

Bill clutched wildly at his arm as the other man fell back, but Clum was out of reach. "My eyes aren't any worse now," he roared, "than they were the last time I drove! Anyhow, I know every ant-track on that run. Earl, I'll absolutely guarantee that— Earl?" he said, quizzically.

Clum did not reply. He had crept silently, miserably away, knowing he had turned what was meant to be a clean job of amputation into the bloodiest butchery. . . .

At nine-thirty, hostlers brought the coach and six-horse team to the front of the stage office. A number of passengers who had been waiting began to stir. They delayed entering until the last minute, for the sun had heated the wooden panels to frying temperature. There was no baggage; they were all round-trip fares who were merely going along for the ride.

Bill got the feel of the scene as he sat at a window in the Aztec. For the last time he was hearing the clink of harness-snaps and the creak of leather thorough-braces. It was incredible that this thing which was his life was about to become history. It was not incredible that George Crane, being a rascal, was sufficiently a rascal not to give him the chance to refuse a ride on the box.

He heard somebody say, "There he comes!" Everybody had a slap on the back for George as he went about checking harness. Then Earl Clum shouted, "All aboard!"

Bill jumped up. He had the money for the round trip in his fist. He'd given George his chance. Then he heard the saloon doors going *whup-whup-whup* and immediately he knew who had entered. George snapped, "If you ain't afraid of falling off, I've got a seat for you. Don't thank me!" he added. "Earl's idea."

Bill tugged his hat down and barged out into the street. Nobody had to tell him where to find the spoke as he mounted. He took the conductor's place at the left side of the box. The crunch of the horse-hair cushion was sweet; he shifted around, just to hear it. He cocked his foot up on the board. Down on the walk the crowd, who had discovered him, were calling up humorous advice and good luck. A lot of the boys seemed to be there, Leo Priester, Doug Whytock, Johnny Prentiss—old men with young men's names.

Again Earl Clum said, *"Board!"* and this time the door was slammed. George let the brake off. He popped his whip over the horses' back. The coach rocked as the ponies went into the collars. The iron tires ground over the earth. "Don't lose your hair, boys!" a man shouted. It didn't get much of a laugh. In those days, being scalped or hung head down over a slow fire was not considered whimsical.

THE sun and air, the incense of sage, unlocked a door for Bill. He felt as if all the last year he had been shut in a room where the bed was never made.

They were out in the tumbled gray-green hills, where the road corkscrewed in and out of the barrancas. It was Apache heaven. Bill felt the uneasiness he always experienced when Indians had been around.

"You think you're so good," George said, dryly, "where are we now?"

Bill crossed his legs. "Picture Rock. We ought to be hitting that pot-hole Earl never got around to filling in a minute. Then you want to hand them in; it's right tight as we go across the bridge."

George gave him the edge of his spite. "Wait till we get out ten miles. You won't know the hogbacks from the hollows."

"Like to make a bet on that?"

"A hundred says you miss Garlic Spring Junction by a hundred yards."

Bill's mind had been operating craftily ever since he felt the rock and heave of the coach and knew he had to get his hands on those lines. "A hundred!" he snorted. "Why not make a real bet? Maybe you can finance that saloon. A dollar of yours gets ten of mine that I call every road-mark from here on in!"

For an instant, George took his eyes off the road. "I'd take that, only the law won't let me collect. You can't do business with mental defectives."

Bill hung the bait higher. "Your fifty to my five hundred!"

George spat between the wheelers, teetering his foot on the brake. "You good for it?"

"I'll put up a check with one of the passengers. Only," Bill added, "you've got to show your good faith, same as me."

George began to nod. "The joker," he said.

"The condition being that I drive."

George shuddered. "It'd be quicker," he said, "if you just put a gun to my ear and pulled the trigger. No bet."

Bill seized his arm, abandoning dissimulation. "George, I've *got* to drive this thing! It's like those stories where a man has a foot cut off, but it keeps on itchin'. That's how it's been with me. Every time you took the stage out, part of me went with you."

"I never noticed it," George said. "In fact, you've got as much chance of driving as I have of being elected governor."

Bill kept hold of his arm. "I've drove every horse between those traces. They'll know what they've got to do."

George pulled away. "Cut it out! I ought to give you the butt of this whip. One more word out of you, and you'll ride in the boot."

Bill wilted. He sat with his hands lying nerveless in his lap. Friendship, the ninety-proof friendship of the old days, was as dead as staging.

At the relay station of Cochise, teams were changed. The coach lurched back into the road with little cataracts of dust rippling from the tires. At noon they made Iron Pipe. Here the passengers descended, half-choked with dust, grayed with a fine layer of Arizona silt, carrying fewer regrets, now, about the passing of an era. In the stage restaurant, a meal of shortcake, jerky, and raw onions was set out.

As the passengers re-entered the coach for the return trip, Farish, the station tender, stood by with a matchstick between his teeth. He was a long-faced sallow man with stained cavalry mustaches. "Good luck, boys," he said. "Tell Earl to run over when he gets a chance. And keep your eyes open."

"Always do," George said cheerfully.

Farish examined the splintered match-end. "Don't get overconfident," he advised. "This ain't the first last-drive I've seen. I've got a graveyard full of folks who went along on last-drives. Only they didn't know it was going to be the last when they set out."

"You're a cheerful slob," remarked Bill.

"Well, there *was* that S.P. raid the other day," Farish said. "And after that shower last week, the water-holes will be full; the varmints may be hanging around yet."

Some of the passengers stirred restively. A man patted his wife's hand and made a pointed remark to the station tender. Farish perceived that he had been tactless. "Well—just thought I'd mention it," he said. He observed the stagecoach roll quickly down the street, scratched his neck, and went back into his office.

Between Iron Pipe and Cochise, Bill sat shrouded in gloomy nostalgia. *Garlic Spring . . . Stone Corral . . . Yucca . . . I remember the night they fired heaps of hay on the road and I had to take off over the prairie. I remember the woman who had a baby in the coach, in Sixty-seven. I remember. . . .*

They changed teams at Cochise and lurched on.

FIFTEEN minutes out, Bill heard a pop which did not sound like a whip. Awareness woke in his brain. Soon he noticed that the horses were running harder; the fluid rhythm of their hoofbeats had stepped up. "Running them a little heavy, ain't you?" he asked George.

George said nothing. Upon the many-tongued chorus of stage-sounds intruded other noises . . . the swelling race of hoofs, a distant yipping, that might have been coyotes. They were twisting through a wilderness of foothills that ran down to the floor of the valley. George said, "Could you see anything at all, Bill, if you was to look back?"

"No," Bill said; "but I've still got my hearing. Can we run it out?"

"A good stage team can always outrun a pony."

Not in the hills; not with the coach slidin' on the turns, Bill thought.

Within the coach, men began to talk in excited bursts. A woman's voice came up hysterically. Then a gun roared, and a smaller-caliber revolver cracked twice in its echo.

The horses were in full down-hill run, single-tree clattering, the leather springs groaning. A stumble, here, would be the end. Bill imagined the Apaches coming in, obscenely streaked with paint. He closed his eyes at the thought of the thirsty knives going to work, drenching themselves in blood.

The Concord hit an outside turn so hard he prepared to jump. Not even a

hack wagon could hold the road at this speed. Rocks kicked from the roadside here landed a hundred feet below. "Lord 'a'mighty!" he yelled. "We might as well be shot as broke to bits!"

George, bent over the lines, did not respond. He continued to let the horses run. The team swung suddenly left, the coach going up on two wheels as it tore through a mat of brush and rocked wildly over rocks. Somehow it came back to the road. "George!" Bill yelled. "You can't do it! Let the boys hold them off till we reach bottom."

George was silent. In the bright, hot sunlight, Bill could see his vague form rocking forward. He was on his knees; he was huddled loosely on the floorboards.

Bill slid to the driver's place. He gathered the lines in a tange, got an arm under George and shifted him so that he lay half-in and half-out of the boot. He straightened on the seat and began talking to the team, and while he talked he sorted the reins. He began to exert his will on the animals. The run-away leaders fought him—spirited, light-legged ponies who would rather run than chew a rail. They were pulling the heart out of the slower, stronger horses behind them.

A gaunt gray finger crooked at him from the roadside. Bill's throat dried. Thimble Rock. A hundred yards, now. That was fine, except that there was still the bridge, and the bridge lay at right angles to the road.

Again he hauled at the lines, but it was like hanging back on a rope tied to a tree. He commenced cursing. It didn't help. He stood up. Back of him the Apaches were snapping at his heels, making their inhuman cries and firing indiscriminately. Ahead, the road was a dim, sun-shot path in a dusk of rocks and brush. He saw the turn, and suddenly he knew what had to be done.

Down the ribbons he sent a quick, sharp tug to the wheelers, the horses nearest him. It was a nasty sort of practical joke, and Bill was ashamed. The disciplined animals tried to run left, into the bank. At the same time he reined the leaders right, onto the bridge. They swung. The wheelers, pulling hard, were brought back

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with a yank. They went down. Dust came up suffocatingly. Bill winced at the thought of all the lost hide as the horses squealed.

But the coach slowed. It thundered into the turn, the lead horses ran across the planks—and stopped. Bill swore, cajoled, yanked at the downed horses. They came lunging up. He made the whip crack, let it bite hide, something he had never done. The stagecoach rolled swiftly across the bridge.

On the other side there was a brief grade, where the road mounted through a gap to descend to the tilted floor of the prairie. They topped this, waved a scarf of dust at the Apaches, and rocked on. The Indians could catch them with nothing slower than a bullet, now, and the stagecoach was a racing, twisting thing that made an impossible target.

But all Bill Underhill could think about, as they hurried along, was the old man under the seat.

THE last drive was over. Stiff, excited passengers dismounted before Clum's stage station to tell the story. Afterward, they came into the office to shake the hand of the somber old man who stood by the door with his whip coiled over his shoulder. Bill let down just enough. A good driver always maintained protocol.

In a back room, the doctor was closeted with George Crane for fifteen minutes. They came out together. "Ball just grooved him," the doctor said. "He won't be any more addled than he was before."

Bill spoke to Clum after the office was emptied "Will you sell that coach to me, Earl?"

"That's asking a lot, Bill," the agent said. "No, I won't sell it. But I'll give it to you. What do you want with it?"

"Never mind."

After dark, Bill and George Crane went over to the stage barn and rolled the Concord out the back. Bill had a can of kerosene with him, which he sloshed into the rear boot. He threw a match after it. The stagecoach made a wonderful fire. The varnished poplar and ash burned like paper.

The two old men stood there for a while, and then, as they heard other men running toward the fire, they departed. "In ten years," Bill grumbled, "people would be coming around here to gawk at that old coach and laugh at it. Or else somebody would buy it for a Wild West show. I'll be damned if I'd want my carcass hauled around like that."

"That's right," George agreed. After a moment he said, "Forgot to tell you I've given up my railroad job, Bill. I just couldn't get used to the grease and iron and all the racket. I've got another job, now, cleaning out pipes down at the brewery."

"What about your saloon—ain't given up on it, have you?"

George shrugged. "It don't look, now, like I'll ever lay up enough to build it."

Not putting too much point on it, Bill remarked, "Clum seems to think it would be a good investment. I'll tell you what—if you still want to cut me in, I'll take a piece of it."

"Why, that's—that's great, Bil!" George said. Then a block developed in his throat and he was unable to say more. He was standing so close to sentiment that he felt as giddy as a schoolgirl.

Bill, too, was discovering that the core of him, which he had always conceived to be iron, had an inner core as soft as butter. For it was a pretty grand thing George had done for him. He had gone to a lot of trouble to arrange that Apache attack. Chances were he had had to pay those punchers day-wages to chase the stagecoach. And he had had to fix it up with Clum and the station man, Farish, to say the right things, and the passengers to act it out. In fact, it had been downright convincing until the punchers began to yell. They had sounded more as though they were hazing cows than raiding a stage, and the way their ponies' horseshoes rang on the rocks was a caution. No Apache he ever saw had had a shod horse, unless it was stolen.

A man like that, even if he couldn't drive for owl-feathers, would do to throw in with. He had heart. He knew that the way to recover a friend was not to do him a favor, but to let him do you a favor.

As they crossed the street, he found himself hoping they would get the fire extinguished in time to save a couple of the wheels. They would make pretty fair chandeliers in the new saloon.

ODYSSEY OF THE MOUNTED

By JOHN D. PUNTIN

IT IS not generally known that the United States was once "invaded" by Canada's famed Royal North West Mounted Police.

It was the summer of 1874. The Sioux were burning and pillaging on the plains of North Dakota. Scalps had been taken. Bold with success they hovered on the outskirts of the village of St. Ives.

The terrified settlers held a meeting. They agreed that without help they would all perish. A force of United States Cavalry was due to reach the area in a few days, but could the town hold out? A suggestion was made. Thirty miles to the north, across the Canadian border, a squadron of the Royal Mounted were camped at Dufferin, Manitoba. Why not send a rider for help? Some of the older men shook their heads. It would be a grave breach of International Law for armed soldiers of the Queen to war against the wards of the United States Government on U. S. soil. But in desperation the horseman was sent.

Commissioner French, in command of the Mounties, knew more about guns than politics. On receiving the message he immediately ordered out the troops. Within thirty minutes of the messenger's arrival the squadron was thundering toward the border.

Superbly mounted, they crossed the Pembina Bridge and streaked across the Dakota prairies. Warned of their approach the wily Sioux warriors fled into the hills.

The Mounties wheeled without entering the town and return to Dufferin.

No official recognition of the act was ever given by the United States Government, due to the question of legality involved, but many a lonely settler along the border slept safer in his hut when he knew the scarlet-coated police were camped nearby.

A FACT STORY

THE CASK OF

Nakassa stepped forward, pressing the machine-gun muzzle against the guard's temple.

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK KRAMER

KHABAR

By
DAN CUSHMAN

TWO men, one of them white, the other black, followed a trail of half-mired tree trunks across the jungle swamp.

The white man was a shade under six feet. He was lean, with a hardness of body rare in these jungles of the deeper Congo where men of his race are apt to go soft. He was about thirty-five. His face was not handsome—it was too long, his cheekbones too high.

Behind him, carrying a uniform can on his head, was a truculent, stoop-shouldered native with the identifying chest scars of a far-away Niger tribe.

The white man paused amid white-crested spear grass to his waist and looked across the apparently stagnant width of a river at a trader's house on stilts sitting on the summit of a small knoll.

"Well, Boleh-kah, how does it look to you?" he asked without turning his head.

Boleh-kah did not answer. As a young man his tongue had been removed by the Sultan of Wadeai in punishment for carrying tales against the government, and for that reason no answer was expected.

There was no evidence of life at the trader's house, nor at the native village whose palm-bundle roofs could be seen among overhanging khaya trees over to the right.

The white man cupped his hands and shouted. He waited, shouted again. His voice seemed to be blotted up by the heat-heavy stillness of late afternoon.

He snapped his fingers to Boleh-kah, and the black, understanding the signal, removed a heavy, Walther automatic from the uniform can. Sound of the gun report, fired against water, brought several bandy-legged natives into view. After a great deal of delay they untied a rather lopsided dugout canoe and paddled across.

The trader, a fat man with unbuttoned clothes, waddled to the veranda door to watch as the canoe touched shore. He laughed deep in his throat.

"Ho! So it is you, Thebes! *Herr Gott!* How long has it been?"

Craig Thebes stepped from the canoe and walked up the cobble path to shake his large, sweaty hand.

"How long? It's been six years, Raufer."

"Six. *Ach.* But what is time in the tropics?" He looked Thebes up and down, his eyes extremely blue and alive in the midst of his vast face. "You must be in haste that you travel through the hours of siesta."

Thebes shook his head and walked past the German to sit in a native-made reed chair. He stretched his long legs, dropped his sun helmet on the floor.

"I'm in no hurry."

"*Ach,* you Americans. Always mit you, the hurry. The dollar—"

"All I'm looking for, Raufer, is schnapps."

"There is that, too. Always at Raufer's, the schnapps." He slapped his hands, and a tall houseboy of the gangly-legged local tribe came in. "Schnapps, and bottled water."

"With ice!" Thebes called after him. "Plenty of ice."

"Ho!" Raufer fell into a chair, jarring his jowls. "Ice, he says it! Stanleyville—there they have ice. Great chunks like glass. So cold, *ja.* I had a clerk—a Belgian. We were in Stanleyville, and he would have ice. Quarts of water mit ice. It killed him. Ice is not for tropics."

Thebes grinned. "Then it's damned thoughtful of you not to serve it."

THE houseboy carried in a round bottle of Scotch whisky, two tall glasses, a bottle of Leopoldville water beaded with mist from the evaporation cooler. Raufer poured, and the two men drank.

"You are from Bukamba?" asked Raufer.

"No. I've been over in the Ngombe country. I am now starving in the copal business."

"*Ach*—so? The swamps are not yielding even at today's high prices?"

"I picked up a few tons. The natives are bringing it around by canoe. I'll wait here for them if you don't mind."

Raufer spread his hands. "A day, a year. Always you are welcome. I should tell you—there is another visitor. A countryman of yours. American. He comes from some city called California. Rex Ammon—you maybe know him?"

"Yes. I knew him down in Johannesburg. Where is he—at siesta?"

"Ha! Siesta indeed." Raufer laughed without humor, shaking his wattles. "He is sick mit blackwater fever."

"Poor devil."

"*Ja.* We send for mission doctor at St. Peter's."

"Did he come?"

Raufer nodded. "But what can be done for blackwater fever? He gave our poor Ammon one week. Now two weeks have passed, and the breath is still in him. Perhaps he lives on the limewater and soda."

There was a rather long silence. The sun hung low over the river, giving a reddish color to evening mists. Raufer ordered supper. They were served a banana salad, boiled chicken covered with curry and saffron, a hard bread, the whole followed by tiny cups of sirupy Egyptian coffee.

Thebes refused a second cup of coffee and stood up. "If you don't mind, I'll pay my respects to Rex Ammon."

"*Ja.*" Raufer was peering up at his face, leaning forward a trifle. "Now I know,

Herr Thebes, who it is you remind me of."

"Not Ammon!"

"*Ja.* But before the fever. Perhaps mit mustache . . ."

"We don't look alike—not even if I grew a mustache. We're Americans, and that makes us *talk* alike."

"Mit mustache . . . But perhaps you are superstitious about dead man, no?"

Thebes laughed. "I don't believe in *avodoun,* if that's what you mean. Ammon won't die and share my hide with me. He can die, and I won't look a bit more like him than I do right now."

"But it is most peculiar. One does not notice at first, but after a while . . ."

Thebes shrugged. "By the way, why did he come here?"

"He came mit man called Nakki-Khabar. Khabar is half-Arab. Him I do not trust. No half-Arabs do I trust. Khabar went on, where I know not. Ammon stayed. Each day, all day he sat here. You know me, *Herr* Thebes. I am not a curious man. But to make talk I asked—something. Some small thing. '*Herr* Raufer,' he said, 'what I am doing here is mine own damned business.' So I asked no more, only after that I charged him for the schnapps he drank. And every day he watched the river—perhaps for the half-Arab to return. And then the fever."

"Where is he?"

"Ibolo will show you."

Thebes followed the barefoot houseboy around the veranda to a wing somewhat removed from the rest of the house. The houseboy opened a screen door. The room beyond was dark. Thebes stood, listening. He could make out the quiet sound of a man breathing. He opened a chemi-dry box, struck a match, carried the flame to a petrol lamp which stood on a three-legged stand. He replaced the brownish chimney and stood for a while, looking at Rex Ammon who lay on a stretched-canvas cot inside a film of mosquito netting.

Ammon was about Thebes' age, and before stricken by fever he might have been as large. He'd wasted spectacularly since Thebes had last seen him. The bridge of his nose was very sharp, his skin was like a mummy's. Thebes parted the nettings and touched his forehead. The man was about finished, though he might have seven or eight days of breathing left in him.

Thebes looked around the room. Ammon's clothes were in a heap beside the chair just as he had stepped out of them. There was a small, leather portmanteau with brass-strap bindings against the wall. The petrol lamp shone on something metallic on the floor within reach of Ammon's fingers. It was a chrome-plated Luger pistol.

Thebes looked back at the portmanteau. It was of a type popular with riverboat travelers of another day. It had a heavy lock that was fashioned by Arabian metalsmiths, but it either did not work, or was not trusted, for new metal loops had been bolted on, and fastened with a small, combination-type padlock.

THEBES bent to touch the padlock when a movement inside the nettings made him turn his head. Ammon's eyes were open. Fever had given them the sharpness of a forest cat's. He had not moved his body, but his hand had swung down, and without groping his fingers had settled on the Luger butt. He angled the barrel up from the floor. His voice came in a husky rattle: "What are you looking for?"

"Ammon! I'm Craig Thebes. Don't you recognize me, Ammon?"

After a long wait—"What do you want?"

"I wanted to help you."

"Get away from that can." He meant the portmanteau.

"Sure." Thebes moved away. "I wasn't trying to rob you."

"Get out."

Thebes backed to the door. He noticed that the butt of the Luger was resting on the floor mattings, its barrel angled off toward the ceiling. The gun weighed a couple of pounds, and Ammon didn't have strength to lift it.

There was a rustle in the thatch roof overhead, the thump of an object falling to the floor—a small, black-necked cobra.

The sound startled Ammon, and the room was ripped by concussion. Thebes could feel the sting of powder as the heavy 9 MM bullet whipped past an arm's length wide.

"Easy!" said Thebes.

"Get out."

Thebes looked along the floor but the cobra was gone from sight. He backed

through the door. Someone was hurrying along the veranda, his weight jolting the elevated floor. He met Raufer.

"*Ach,* so. You are alive. I should have told you of the gun."

A laugh jolted Thebes' shoulders. "But you thought I should find out the hard way."

"*Herr* Thebes, believe me. I did not think of gun—"

"Sure. Has he kept it there all the time?"

"*Ja.*"

"Why?"

"How should I know?"

"Has anybody tried to get inside that portmanteau?"

Ammon angled the Luger up from the floor. His voice came in a husky rattle: "What are you looking for?"

A harsh laugh sounded in Raufer's thick throat. "You were the first, *Herr* Thebes."

They returned to the front veranda. Thebes sprawled in the reed chair, propped up his feet, watched Raufer mix water and schnapps. There was a half musical sound of a balafron being played in the native village. Raufer spoke, his voice indicating the smile on his lips: "You think it mysterious?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The portmanteau. But are not all portmanteaus mysterious when they are locked?"

Raufer went feeling through the dark, locating the dials of his wireless. A more-British-than-London voice came from the Bulawayo station giving the account of a bombing in Tel Aviv.

Raufer said, "But we will not have to wait long to open the portmanteau, eh, Thebes?"

"We have good times, we ghouls!" Thebes rolled and licked a cigarette into shape. He lighted it, revealing his bronzed, expressionless face. "I don't give a damn about that portmanteau, and when Ammon shuffles off you can open it or not, and I won't even watch over your shoulder."

THEBES slept in a small room off the veranda. Next morning he glanced in at Rex Ammon. A native had been forcing lime water and soda into him, and now he was apparently asleep. The Luger pistol was in its old place a few inches from his relaxed hand. Thebes walked on and found Raufer already occupying his favorite chair. They drank schnapps, had tiffin of meat and fresh fruits, slept out siesta. Evening and Raufer again worked the dials of his wireless, bringing voices and canned music over a thousand miles of jungle static. Another day passed, another, and more, merging one with the next in the timeless monotony of the tropics.

Thebes' cargo of copal did not arrive. He cursed all the race of Bafuto paddlers. And one morning Rex Ammon had ceased to breathe.

"It is easy to die in the jungle," said Raufer, shrugging his fat shoulders. "The snakes, the schnapps, the thousand fevers of the Congo. So tomorrow, you, me, all of us, *ja?*"

"You're quite a philosopher," said Thebes lifting the Luger pistol. There was one cartridge gone from the clip. Its empty case was there, beside the cot. He slapped the load back, tossed it on the portmanteau.

"Is there anyone to notify?" asked Raufer.

"Rex Ammon wasn't even his real name. He used to get checks from home made out to Preston, or Priestly—I've forgotten. He was in trouble back in the States."

"He has also trouble in Rhodesia, so?"

Thebes nodded.

Raufer touched the portmanteau with the toe of his canvas shoe. "We could perhaps notify the Colonial Administrator. Or the American Consul-General."

"Perhaps when the half-Arab comes back . . ."

"Ja."

They buried Rex Ammon at the edge of the jungle, and Raufer read at some length from a German Bible.

A native burned sulphur inside the sick-room. Its raw scent drifted around the veranda to where the white men had seated themselves over tall drinks.

"Why are you staring at me?" asked Thebes.

"Ho! You think it is the native superstition again. How is it called? The *avodoun?* No, I was not thinking our poor Ammon's soul had come into your body. At night perhaps I believe such stories, but not by daylight. Still, if you were mit mustache . . ."

"The hell with you, Raufer."

"Ho!"

They drank, and in an unexpected outburst Raufer cursed in German, striking the table with his sweaty palm,

"Verdammen! Hear me, *mein freund*—next season I will leave this place. *Ja,* I will take mine moneys and go downriver to Leopoldville. Perhaps to Berlin if it can be found after your Yankee bombs. I will sit at my ease, and listen to music, and look on women—in clothes. *Ach*—when I was young did I ever think I should someday long to see women in clothes? I ask it. *Nein!* Look at me, *Herr* Thebes. Old, fat. But do you know mine real age? Not sixty, but forty-four. Or perhaps forty-five. Thus, the tropics."

Thebes smiled. He rolled a cigarette of native leaf, lighted it, blew fragments of tobacco from his shirt front with his first lungful of smoke.

"Don't let poor Rex spoil your day."

ON THE following morning Raufer ensconced himself in a *tepoi* and was carried away on the shoulders of eight natives, bound cross-country for the mission hospital at St. Peter's for his twice-yearly tetanus injections. Alone Craig Thebes sat on the veranda, looking across the sunlit river at the green wall of jungle distorted by heat waves.

A canoe drew up, driven by a crew of native paddlers, and a tall, hawk-faced man in a hood and *'jeballa* of loose calico stepped ashore.

Thebes leaned forward, watching him. He drank the remainder of his schnapps and water without moving his eyes. The man spoke, his voice carrying to the veranda with nasal sharpness, pronouncing words of the Congo jargon sprinkled with Arabian. After a while he reached beneath his *'jeballa* and strewed a handful of copper franc pieces at the feet of the paddlers. He turned and strode toward the veranda, a wooden object tucked under his arm.

He opened the screen and looked on Thebes with his shoe-button eyes.

"Come in, Khabar," said Thebes, guessing at the man's identity.

Khabar shot a glance up and down the veranda. He spoke: "*Sidi* Ammon. So you are alive."

Thebes' expression did not change. It was almost as though he expected to be mistaken for Rex Ammon. He sat quite still, leaning back in his reed chair, the brown cigarette dangling from the corner of his hard-slashed mouth. He reached one finger and brushed his upper lip as though expecting to find a mustache.

"Alive?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I be alive?"

Khabar shrugged his bony shoulders. "The natives. Those paddlers. They picked up some message on the talking drums. The drums said a white man had died here at Bamkula. I asked if it was you, and they said it was." He spat. "The liars."

"You have been gone a long time."

"He traveled far!" the half-Arab barked back in sharp defensiveness. He held up the round wooden object. Thebes could see it was a trunk of cedrela about four inches in diameter and five inches in length. It was evidently hollowed to form a sort of cask, with a lid cut to exact size and hammered down so firmly that it was practically welded into a solid piece. The whole had then been dipped in a resin-gum to make it moisture-proof. Beneath the transparent gum was an inscription in charcoal—Arab letters he could not at the moment decipher.

"Where is he now?" asked Thebes.

Khabar smiled a little, holding out the cask. "Well, *Sidi?*" he asked.

Thebes stood, reaching to take the cask from him, but Khabar jerked it away.

"Do you think I am so much the fool?"

Thebes sank back. He smoked his cigarette down to his fingers, stamped it out on the floor mattings, rolled another. He did not take his eyes off the half-Arab.

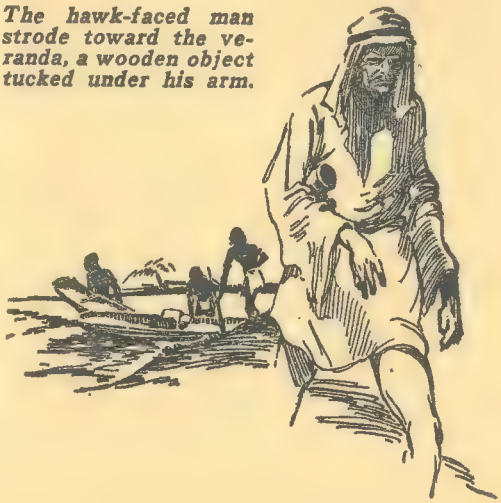
Khabar spoke: "You will keep your promise, *Sidi* Ammon! You will pay me as *Sidi* Humphries said you would."

"Of course I will. What *was* the promise?"

"Ha!" Khabar laughed with a jerk of his skinny shoulders. "The money, *Sidi*. The gold money. You have it—I know, for I have seen it."

"How much gold money?"

"The four quarter-thousand gold escudo pieces to match the two you have already



The hawk-faced man strode toward the veranda, a wooden object tucked under his arm.

given me." He twisted his bloodless lips down at the corners. "Or will you try to tell me you no longer have them?"

"How do I know what's inside that cask?"

"By this time you should have learned to trust me."

"I wouldn't trust you from here to that schnapps bottle."

"You . . ."

"What did you start to call me?"

"Nothing. I will not quarrel with you and be killed. Pay me the four gold escudos, *Sidi.*"

"What's in that cask?" barked Thebes.

"The treasure you sent me for—the head of a Jew!"

The cask would have held no head larger than a monkey's. Thebes kept looking at Khabar's face, trying to guess the meaning of his words. He stood up, and strode around the circular veranda to Rex Ammon's room.

The place still had an odor of burned sulphur. The bed was as Ammon had left it, his whites were still in a heap near the chair, the portmanteau was against one wall, locked by the combination padlock.

Thebes clicked the knob back and forth a few times. He stood up, cursing the corrosion of the tropics. He drew his Walther pistol, aimed, pulled the trigger. The lock was split by the heavy, 9 MM jacketed slug.

"You do not use the Luger?" asked Khabar, staring intently at Thebes' face. Thebes returned his gaze. The fellow did not seem to be doubting his identity. Perhaps Ammon had been particularly attached to the Luger.

"This kills men quicker."

Khabar tilted his head back, eyes almost closed. His lips held the hint of a smile.

"You would be one to learn of the quicker way to kill, *Sidi.*"

Thebes jerked the shattered padlock free of the portmanteau, and unsnapped the lid. He pawed among extra linen, clips of cartridges, airtight cans filled with cigarettes. His search uncovered a rolled-up money belt. He felt through its pockets locating a tight roll of currency and several large coins. The coins were gold escudo pieces, coins of large denomination which one occasionally found circulating in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique across the hill country to the east. They were stamped 250 escudos, though their gold content made them worth three times that amount at the current exchange of Bank of Portugal paper.

HE HANDED Khabar the four pieces and took from his fingers the wooden cask. It was unexpectedly light. Thebes shook it, and a smile touched Khabar's lips.

"I am sure your boss-man Humphries will be pleased when he opens it."

"He'd better be." Thebes held the cask at arm's length. "I asked you what was in it!" he barked.

"And I tell you it was that which Humphries sought. A treasure, *Sidi!*"

"Are you going back with me?"

"To Kembawe? No. I will go, as I planned, to Dar es Salaam. But if Humphries should want another task done . . ."

"The head of another Jew?"

"Why yes, perhaps the head of another Jew."

"He pays well, doesn't he?"

"Very well. And why should he not? Is he not rich? And will he not be far richer soon?"

"Will he?"

"You yourself said you played for one of the biggest stakes on the continent. Why else would that little package be worth one thousand escudos, and that golden ring five hundred escudos more?"

"Why yes," said Thebes, looking at the tall half-Arab through slitted lids. "Why indeed?"

Khabar turned and strode down the gently sloping land to the river's edge, his *'jeballa* very bright in the direct sun. He shouted in the Congo jargon, calling his reluctant crew, and within five minutes the canoe was an indistinct blur.

Thebes seated himself on the edge of the couch, the mosquito netting in billows around him, searching the remaining pockets of the money belt. He found three more quarter-thousand escudo pieces, a roll of Bank of Portugal paper in hundred and thousand-escudo denominations. The whole would come to about eight hundred dollars American. In another pocket he found a couple of uncut, placer-quality diamonds, a man's signet ring with an onyx top set with the gold letter "W," a baggage check from the Casa del Saltazar in Lourenço Marques.

He held the gold signet ring for a while, then he put it back and went through the portmanteau. There was nothing more of interest.

He closed the portmanteau, and carried the little cedrela cask back to the table. He examined it, reading the Arabian inscription through the transparent coating of hardened gum, translating it—*Sidi Roger Humphries—Kembawe Plantation.*

He examined the lid with an evident thought of opening it, but it was hammered so tightly that removal would have meant the destruction of the cask. He decided against it, and went inside to inspect the old, fly-specked map of Africa tacked on the wall. Nothing marked Kembawe. He asked the mulatto clerk, but he had never heard of Kembawe either.

Thebes took siesta, sleeping out the hot hours in a reclining rattan chair. He awoke and walked to the native rest house, looking for Boleh-kah. The mute black man was not around. Thebes finally found him asleep in a bark-cloth hammock in a tribesman's hut.

"Wake up!"

Boleh-kah climbed out, blinking his red-rimmed eyes truculently.

"Yes, you hate my guts," growled Thebes. "I wouldn't have you around three minutes if you weren't the best damned porter south of Dakar."

Boleh-kah did not answer, of course. His only vocal response was a slight hissing sound as he exhaled over his stump tongue. He stood, hunched powerfully, his long arms heavy with copper bracelets, waiting to hear what more his *bwana* would say.

"We're going. To Kembawe, wherever in hell that is."

CHAPTER II

KEMBAWE PLANTATION

NATIVE paddlers sang a tribal song in monotonous rhythm as the dugout canoe split the placid surface of the Bamkula. On both sides the jungle made solid, spongy walls of green. There were miles of swamps, the water low, exposing the brace roots of trees.

One day—another—another. The current quickened as the black heart of the Congo was left behind. There were hills, deep in forest. To north and south rose mountains whose tops were forever hidden by purple mists.

Thebes paid off his Bamkula paddlers and hired a half-dozen wild, North-Zulu tribesmen with tufted hair and faces made grotesque by scar-enlarging.

They moved overland, through grass higher than their heads, and reached water flowing east toward the territory of the Portuguese.

A trading post of whitewashed mud and bamboo stood in the shade of massive baobab trees, offering a miserable stock which consisted chiefly of trinkets and cheap machete knives. The Hindu trader had heard of Kembawe plantation. He pointed downriver, and hooked his finger to the south. "Two days—one day."

"Do you know Roger Humphries?"

He shook his head.

The Zulus started the long trip back after spending their wage on wire and glass trinkets at the Hindu's store. Thebes hired a crew of Rukwa Bantus led by a toothless old man who claimed to have once gathered vine rubber and sold it to Kembawe.

The dugout canoe moved downriver for two days. A smaller stream flowed in from the south. The Rukwas pulled steadily from a crouched position, chanting over and over the simple words of a tribal song. Occasionally they stood to pole the craft across mudbars where crocodiles lay like driftwood, drugged by tropic heat. Here and there the jungle broke away, revealing a hill country yellow-green with savannah grass. There was a bend, an unexpected clearing, a dock of rotting hardwood timbers projecting into the muddy stream.

The toothless one shouted something in his unfamiliar dialect, and the dugout was swung ashore. Thebes signaled Boleh-kah to follow, climbed a low shoulder of land, and paused to look across the jungle clearing.

There was a stretch of level ground that had once been millet field, but was now overgrown by cane grass and orchilla. A cluster of rather substantial native huts of hardwood poles and plaited palm stood in an area of hammered, reddish earth; closer to the river were the ruins of several metal-roofed storehouses, and beyond, on

a small eminence, was a large, sheet-metal covered plantation house.

A tall native, wearing white man's trousers and nothing else, stalked down a path through orchilla weed with a sub-machine gun in the crook of his arm.

The native advanced until only thirty or forty meters separated him from Thebes, then his face broke into a wide smile.

"Ah—*bwana* Ammon. Wit'out mustache I do not know you. So you have return after long trip."

"Sure I've returned," growled Thebes from the side of his mouth. "And point that gun some other direction."

"Yes, *bwana!*"

Thebes strode on, the little cedrela cask under his arm, hunched forward a trifle as he remembered the walk of Rex Ammon.

He glanced at the gun in the native's arm. It was an Austen sub-machine gun with double pistol grips, its shoulder rest removed. He paused six or seven steps from the native and spoke.

"You! I've forgotten your name."

"Nakassa."

"Yes—Nakassa. Who told you to come down here and shove that gun into my guts?"

"No one. But boss-man, he say watch."

"Humphries?"

"Yes, *bwana.*"

"Where is he?"

"At big house."

"Who else is there?"

"Only *bwana* Sautel. Maybe Hari-Minggu. Musgrove, he go since you left. Maybe I hear Lourenço Marques. The prisoners—" Nakassa smiled, showing his sharp-filed teeth, black from betel-nut chewing—"no more have escaped."

Thebes found a hundred-escudo note and slipped it in the band of Nakassa's filthy pants. The native looked at its denomination, and exhaled.

"Ah, *bwana!*"

"You don't get that kind of money from Humphries, do you?"

"No."

"All right—just don't forget who your *baminga* is around here."

Natives were running through the high orchilla weeds, babbling in a dialect that sounded half Bantu, half Zulu. Thebes scarcely glanced at them. He strode on

Thebes hired a half-dozen wild, North-Zulu tribesmen with tufted hair.

toward the plantation house, Boleh-kah, carrying the portmanteau, following a few steps behind.

A MAN in fresh whites was watching from the upper veranda. Thebes looked at him without seeming to. He was fifty or so, balding and grayish, too fat, but still powerful. A second man sat beyond him, elbows propped on a table, his face set off by long, wavy hair that made him look almost like a woman.

Thebes would have climbed the steps to the lower door without appearing to notice them, had not the heavy man called down, "Well, Rex. This is indeed a pleasure."

Thebes stopped, and looked up, twist-

A tall native stalked down a path with a sub-machine gun in the crook of his arm. Then his face broke into a smile. "Ah—bwana Ammon. Wit'out mustache I do not know you. So you have return."

ing the corners of his mouth in a smile. "Sure I'm back. What the hell?"

"And I gather you have been successful."

The heavy man spoke with an accent that showed he was English of better than average education.

Thebes strode on, crossed the lower veranda, paused just inside the front door for a rapid look around.

He was standing in a large front room. There were windows along the front and the right side, but jalousies had been closed against the afternoon light, and it seemed quite dim. An archway opened onto a dusty-looking trophy room, and to the left was a hall leading to another wing of the building. Two sets of stairs led above. The first, he judged, would take him to the veranda.

He climbed it, reached an upper hall, turned right and was on the veranda.

The big man rose, and their eyes met.

If Thebes feared this first moment of close scrutiny, his attitude did not show it. He placed the cask on a little teak table, and shook the big man's hand.

"Well, Rex, I had about given you up."

Thebes laughed, "Don't give me up too quick."

"No. Your trip seemed to have served you well enough, old boy. You've gained on it. And that death rattle's gone from your throat."

Thebes made no comment. The other fellow still sat with forearms on the table,

making no move to rise and exchange handshakes. He was a trifle older than Thebes first thought—probably twenty-two or twenty-three, although his cheeks were still downy like a woman's. He was olive brown, hair dark and wavy, baby-faced, but with eyes hard as onyx. The contrast was not reassuring. It was like finding a rabbit with the eyes of a snake.

"I say, old fellow, what do we have here?" the big man asked, lifting the tiny cedrela cask.

"Why don't you open it and see?"

"Why yes, that might be a good idea." He twisted the lid, but it would not budge. "Your knife, Sautel!" he said, snapping his fingers to the smooth young man.

Sautel reached behind his collar, drew out a short machete, and rolled it across the table without moving his eyes from Thebes' face.

"Humphries." Thebes spoke the word without looking at the big man. It could have been a request for Humphries' attention, or a question concerning his whereabouts.

"Yes?" asked the large man picking up the machete.

"Where's Musgrove?"

"He went to L.M. as it was planned."

"And Hari-Minggu?"

"Ho, I say!" Humphries laughed, tossing his head back on its massive neck. "Hari-Minggu! She was not here to greet you, but do not fear. She has waited. Still true to you."

Humphries placed his back toward Sautel, and remaining in that manner lifted his eyebrows to Thebes in a significant manner. It was evident he wished to convey something about the woman and Sautel, and also get Thebes to change the subject.

Thebes drew one of Ammon's blue-paper cigarettes from his pocket, lighted it. He did this while keeping his eyes on Sautel.

"Well?" he barked. "Why in hell don't you say something?"

"What about?" Sautel asked in a voice that matched exactly his soft appearance. There was a hint of Portugal or Spain in his inflection.

"What about her?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"The hell you don't."

Sautel moved from his chair suddenly, his hand sliding beneath his white jacket. Thebes recognized the movement. He hooked the table with one toe, spinning it from his way. His left hand darted, catching Sautel's wrist as it came out gripping a blue automatic.

Sautel was not small, and for all his apparent softness he was unexpectedly quick and strong.

He bent double and twisted around, almost pulling himself from Thebes' grasp. Thebes rammed him against the bamboo lath of the wall, and held him for a few seconds, letting him writhe back and forth. Their faces were close. He could smell the sandalwood and lotus perfume that Sautel had rubbed in his hair.

Thebes laughed through his teeth, moved back a trifle, and twisted Sautel's gun hand high, back of the shoulder.

Thebes' fist came up with a synchronized movement, smashing Sautel's jaw, snapping his head back, stringing his dark, pomaded hair across his face. His knees buckled, and for the moment his cobra eyes lacked focus.

Thebes booted the gun across the veranda, stalked back, and sprawled out in his chair, hands resting on his knees.

HUMPHRIES' face had turned florid. "I've told you enough times there must be no trouble—"

"He went for his gun—or didn't you notice?" Thebes barked.

Humphries breathed deeply, and then shrugged his massive shoulders. He looked around at Sautel who was steadying himself with shoulders against the wall.

"I want no more trouble over that woman, or she'll have to go from here. When we collect, the pair of you are welcome to knife each other as you please."

Thebes laughed without humor, lighting another of Ammon's cigarettes, blowing smoke from his nostrils.

"Then keep your punk off me."

Humphries forced a smile. "Your trip didn't change your disposition any."

Thebes pointed to the cask with the end of his cigarette. "I brought it back, didn't I? Why don't you open it up?"

"I'm doing that."

Humphries ran the machete blade around the lid, but was unable to pry it off.

It was a head no larger than a monkey's — but unquestionably the head of a man.

"Why did you put it on so tight?"

"Blame Khabar."

"Khabar? Where did you run into that snake?"

Thebes had naturally taken it for granted that Khabar and Ammon had left Kembawe together. His expression did not change, nor did he bother to answer the question.

"I say, old man, what in the devil have you in here?"

Thebes thought Humphries knew that, too.

"It's Christmas," he said. "I wanted to surprise you."

Humphries kept working with the lid, then with sudden exasperation he seized the machete and swung it like a hatchet. The cask was split like a length of firewood, the two sides falling in opposite directions leaving a small object on the table.

It was a head no larger than a monkey's —but unquestionably the head of a man.

The skin was browned like a mummy's, the nose and forehead prominent, like a caricature of the Hittite races.

"What the devil!" snarled Humphries.

Sight of the shrunken human head seemed to have knocked him off balance for the moment. He took hold of a chair, staring first at the head, and then at Thebes.

"Who is it?" he asked in a voice that was high and edgy.

Thebes settled back in his chair, laughing, expelling a lungful of smoke from his mouth.

"It's still Christmas, Humphries."

"Damn you, Ammon, your jokes get a little too grisly at times."

"Ha!"

"Whose head is this?"

"I thought it was a rather remarkable caricature."

Sautel spoke in his smooth voice, "It's Leov Kunz."

"Sure," grinned Thebes. "The punk got it right the first time."

Humphries sat down. He took the dwarfed head in his hands with a little, shuddery movement, turned it slowly.

"Rather a good job, don't you think?" Thebes asked.

"I suppose so. Who's responsible for it —Khabar?"

"Oh, no. You never saw an Arab with that much sense of humor. It was some natives—the Bokinnas. Maybe you'd like to try a job like that sometime. It's simple—with a little practice. The Bokinnas don't even take out the bones. They dissolve out the bone calcium with wood-acid, and do the shrinking job with hot sand. Kunz, there, had a nice, strong profile. They enjoyed working with him."

Humphries put back the head. His complexion had turned slightly yellowish. He raised his bulk from the chair and plodded to a room down the veranda where he could be heard pouring water and washing his hands.

He came back and sat down. "How about Weissenberg?"

Thebes felt inside the moneybelt, locating the signet with the gold "W." He rolled it across the table.

"I'm sorry this proof isn't more conclusive, but there didn't seem to be any Bokinnas handy when I ran across poor Weissenberg."

"You went to too much trouble as it was," said Humphries. "I trust you."

A laugh jolted Thebes' shoulders. "I know who you trust. You trust Weissenberg and Kunz."

SAUTEL picked up the head and fondled it in his hands. He seemed to enjoy the touch of the brown, mummified skin. The heat of late afternoon hung over the large plantation house. From somewhere came the rustle of air through a bamboo shutter, but it did not reach the front veranda.

Thebes yawned, and stamped out his cigarette.

"Don't you ever serve whiskey here, Humphries?"

"I say, I'm sorry old man. I've been off the deuced stuff, and—"

"So I see." There were two tall glasses on a three-legged stand. "Does Sautel take them two at a time now?"

"One of those belonged to Hari-Minggu."

"Where is she?"

"At siesta."

At mention of the woman's name, Sautel lowered the dwarfed head and again fastened Thebes with his intense eyes.

Humphries tinkled a tiny Chinese bell made of black and green jade, and a houseboy came in, garbed in a freshly laundered loincloth and stengah-shifter.

Thebes had no idea how Ammon was in the habit of taking his drinks, so he simply said, "The usual."

The houseboy returned with whiskey neat and a tall tumbler of water. Thebes was used to taking his whiskey *sa-tengah,* but he drank this straight with chaser.

"How many of them do we have here now?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You know who I mean."

"The prisoners? The same number as when you left, and I don't appreciate your sarcasm. It was as much your fault as anyone's that Weissenberg and Kunz escaped."

"Name them over to me."

"Your memory is short."

"Anybody's memory goes to hell in this heat. Good lord, man do you realize how long I've been gone?"

Humphries shrugged, and said in a bored voice, "There's Shon, and Leib, and Karl Frankel. And of course there's the young woman. You remember her, I'll wager. Oh I say, old fellow, don't look so sour. We can't have our way with *all* women, can we?"

Thebes risked no more questions for the moment. He leaned back, chain-smoking the blue-paper cigarettes.

He heard a tinkling sound, the soft whisk of feet on floor mattings. Sautel moved suddenly, setting the head back on the table. Something about his agitation told Thebes that the woman, Hari-Minggu, was approaching.

She turned the corner and drew up suddenly, her eyes on Thebes.

His only movement was to lower the cigarette and look at her through the ascending trail of smoke.

She was a slim girl, about twenty-one or twenty-two, possessing a flat-cheeked beauty that was half Malay and half God-knew-what. That some of the latter was white was evidenced by the slim bonal structure of her nose. Thebes had seen a good many with the same sort of beauty working in the sing-song houses in Singapore.

Her hair was almost black, drawn tightly, decorated with a single, white jasmine blossom. She wore sandals of braided raffia held by thongs around her ankle and large toe; her only garment was a sarong of green silk, secured tightly above her small, high breasts. Around her neck was a tinkling circle of gold pieces on a chain.

"Ah!" she exhaled the word, and walked on, her slippers making a soft slap-slap against the floor. "I did not recognize you without your mustache, *luang.*"

Humphries delivered the table a blow with the flat of his hand. "I say! That's it. I've been wondering all along what it was about you that wasn't quite right. You've shaved off your mustache."

The girl started past the table, and her eyes fell on the dwarfed head. She shrank back, a scream in her throat.

"You see, she recognized him right away," said Thebes.

"He's that poor little man who escaped!" she cried, running the words all together. "Did you . . ."

Humphries spoke in a tone designed to calm her. "Now, now! It was sent to us, old dear. Don't get yourself in a fever." He laughed. "How could you even dream your own dear Rex would do such a thing?"

"Then it is really . . ."

"It's Leov Kunz," said Sautel.

She looked down on Thebes. "But *you* didn't—"

"How could you believe such a thing?"

UNEXPECTEDLY she smiled, slid forward with a supple movement, her smooth body making a slight hissing sound beneath the silk sarong, and seated her-

self on the chair arm. She twisted a finger in his hair.

"You do not seem ver' glad to see your little Hari!" she whispered.

He took her hand, twisting it to bring her close. His grip must have hurt her, but her face showed no pain.

"I'm *damned* glad to see you!"

"Perhaps you did not believe I would be waiting."

"I knew you'd *better* be waiting."

She laughed with dulcet softness. Unexpectedly, she rattled off some words he did not catch.

"What?"

"Pukal berpa tuan kelar hutan?"

She was smiling, waiting for an answer. It had been years, but his mind, in desperation translated the words—"At what time did you come out of the jungle?"

He lifted a shoulder carelessly and answered, *"Pukal tige"*—three o'clock. Actually it had been closer to four, but he could not think of the Malay *empat* until too late.

"Ah!" she said, exhaling, twisting her finger again in his hair. He looked up and saw the thoughtful smile on her lips.

Humphries said, "I didn't know you understood Malay."

Thebes reclined farther in his chair, looking through him with slitted eyes, wondering which of the men he should open up on if the going should get rough. He didn't bother to answer, and it was Hari who spoke.

"He has learned many things since coming to know me."

Humphries laughed, "Oh I say, that's all right. That's a topping way to put it."

Sautel rose with an abrupt movement and walked toward the door. He noticed his pistol lying on the floor—a heavy, blued-steel Browning automatic made in a Belgian factory. He bent, and picked it up. Thebes was watching him from the sides of his eyes. His right hand closed on the butt of the Luger at his waist; he angled the barrel beneath his coat. Hari did not move. Her half reclining body concealed his action, but Sautel made no attempt to bring the gun into play. He slid the Browning to a holster beneath his cotton jacket, and walked out of sight into the hallway.

"What the devil's wrong with *him?*" Thebes asked Hari.

A native passed, carrying two buckets on a shoulder yoke.

"You *should* know."

She said it like that, emphasizing the word *"should,"* but keeping her voice beneath Humphries' hearing.

Humphries leaned back, dozing in his chair as evening shadows lengthened. A breeze carried the odor of a cookfire from the native huts clustered beneath panga-panga trees. A native walked from the rear of the plantation house passing close beneath the veranda rail, carrying two buckets on a shoulder yoke. One of the buckets contained water, the other a steaming meat and millet porridge.

Thebes stood up, stretching his muscles. He walked to the far end of the veranda, again catching sight of the native who was taking his burden toward a low-roofed mud-and-bamboo house which stood in the midst of a little compound about three hundred meters distant. A second native stood near the compound gate leaning against the trunk of a palm, watching the approach of the bucket carrier. He moved, and a beam from the descending sun brought to life the shine of a rifle barrel across his arm. The man was a guard, and

the building was obviously some sort of prison.

Thebes walked back to his chair.

"How's the ransom these days?" he asked Humphries.

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

Thebes face showed no concern over the poor reception of this shot in the dark.

"Then I'm not talking about anything," he growled.

"If you're intending to suggest that I'm collecting some private money and holding it back on you—"

"If I though that I'd put a slug of lead right through your guts." He gestured with a loose flip of his hand. "Sit down, Humphries, and let your blood cool off. It'll help you live longer."

Humphries sank back slowly, but his pale, predatory eyes remained fastened on Craig Thebes.

CHAPTER III

OPIUM DREAM

SUPPER was served pleasantly behind newly patched screens on the lower veranda. The lamb, made tender by papaya wrappings and stick-broiled over coals, was delicious. There was also a concoction of rice cooked with cachews and native peppercorns, hard biscuit with canned butter, and coffee made by simple boiling after the European manner. Afterward Humphries called for a private jar of honey, almond and pomegranate paste.

Darkness crept in from the jungle. Natives were beating a message drum, its two-toned rhythm speaking with a "tongue" that no white man has ever learned. A cool breeze sprang up, carrying the spicy fragrance of jasmine, the cinnamon odor of pink salvoda.

Humphries closed the jar of honey paste and called for a houseboy to light the petrol lamp.

He said to Thebes, "Musgrove went down to L.M., but I guess you knew. We picked up a report on the *DeSilva* from the Cape Town wireless the other day. No mention of trouble, so I guess she got by all right. She'll unload the rotters down at Portamboko, or at the Plata if Musgrove can't tidy things up with the commissioner. I don't anticipate any trouble, however. You know how these Portuguese colonials are—crooked as the rug peddlers of Damascus."

"When will we see some money?"

"You've seen a little already, don't forget that, my Yankee friend. But there should be more along shortly."

"How shortly?"

"Damn it, as soon as the *DeSilva* unloads."

Humphries put the lid back on the honey and almond paste and strode from the veranda. Thebes stood up also. He looked around for the houseboy who had carried him the drink that afternoon.

"Did Boleh-kah take my portmanteau to the room?"

"I do not know, master."

"Well find out!"

"Yes, master."

The houseboy climbed the stairs with Thebes following. He circled the upper veranda, opened a door with patched screen, and paused there.

"Well, light up!"

The houseboy went on in. A match flared up. He transferred the fire to the wick of a factory-made candle. Thebes looked around.

The room was small, but clean enough. It had "breathing walls" of porous bamboo weave. Woven palm mattings were on the floor, overhead was a mesh of rattan to catch any lizards or snakes that might fall from the thatch roof. There were native punkahs suspended from the ceiling from which the driving rods had been removed. Furniture consisted of two red chairs and a thatch-pallet bed inside dusty mosquito curtains.

He glanced inside the tin water pitcher. It was empty. Above were shelves filled with shaving equipment, lotions, tubes of Tiger Balm and Hong Gim headache paste, a tin containing enough Turkish hashish to keep a man talking to himself until the next rainy season.

An archway covered by drapes of cheap Calcutta cotton in the customarily hideous yellow and red pattern led to a little sitting room. Beyond was a door with screen tacked over it looking out on a tiny patio.

Thebes drew a handful of silver two-and-a-half escudo pieces from his pocket and dropped them in the houseboy's hand.

"Don't forget who gave that to you."

"No, master!" breathed the houseboy, oyster-eyed at the wealth.

"There'll be more where that came from when I leave this plantation—alive."

He nodded.

"Get that? When I leave here *alive.*"

"Yes. Me get it!"

"What's my name?"

"Ammon. Rex Ammon, master."

"All right. If you hear anything said about me, come tell me about it. Remember?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now take that mosquito curtain outside and dust it. Get bottled water. Whisky."

He watched the houseboy carry out the mosquito curtain. At last he was alone. He sat down, exhaling, lying back on the bed. He stared at the ceiling, and at last spoke softly to himself: "What the hell goes on around here? What *in* the hell?"

The houseboy returned with a clean mosquito curtain and bottles of whisky and water. Thebes lay on his back as the jungle became inky outside. At last he sat up, examined the load in Ammon's pistol which he carried at his waist, and then stepped outside, leaving the candle burning.

IT WAS dark on the veranda, with only a narrow strip of moonlight falling along the railing. His shoes made scarcely a sound as he went around to the front. No one seemed to be around.

He returned and climbed down the rear ladder. There was a light in the large room, but the jalousies were still closed. He circled, pausing beneath a sandalwood tree which had once been part of Kembawe's formal garden. Humphries was talking.

"Damn it, let me tell you this . . ." He had raised his voice, but he lowered it again, and only a stray word or two came to Thebes. He thought the man was talking to Sautel. Instead, it was the girl who answered him. Her voice was a hushed murmur.

" . . . And what were you saying in Malay?" Humphries asked, again raising his voice.

She gave a short, noncommittal answer.

A chair squeaked as Humphries stood. He walked into the range of light from the petrol lamp shining through the front door. He opened the screen, went inside. His face looked older, more fiercely cut by lamplight, his jaw was set in lines of surly aggressiveness.

Thebes waited for the girl to follow, but she didn't show herself.

He walked toward the river until he was out of sight in cane grass, then he circled, keeping a hundred meters of darkness between himself and the house, heading for the makeshift prison.

Weeds and grass had been scythed down over a circular area fifty or sixty meters on each side of it. Only the roof of the low, mud and bamboo house was visible above the compound wall. A guard was still in front, walking from place to place with barefoot silence. Moonlight shone blue on his rifle, reflected with oily luster on his skin. Thebes moved around to the rear, and watched there for a considerable time without seeing anyone.

He stepped from the shadow of cane grass and orchilla, and, maintaining a casual stride, crossed the beaten area to the deep shade of some thorny salvoda shrubs. The compound was then only fifteen or twenty paces distant.

The wall was of bamboo posts, large as a man's leg, set in earth. Their tops were fastened together by many wrappings of barbed wire, and wire was also strung in zig-zag fashion to posts set at intervals around the outside. Through cracks in the compound wall Thebes could see a window of the house lighted by a yellow-flamed grease lamp.

Somebody was talking. He recognized the language as German, but none of the words were distinguishable. In the native village half a kilo away the dancing drums were busy, mingling with the repeated *"ke-ke-ya"* of men chanting a sorcerer's charm. Behind him, in the jungle, he could hear the night sounds of laughing bats, and the cries of parrots which had not settled for the night.

There seemed to be only the one guard.

He left the shadow of salvoda bushes to cross the moonlit area to the compound wall. He took four or five steps—and paused. A black man had appeared from a wall shadow and stood, crouched forward a trifle, a rifle shining dull blue in his hands.

Thebes drew the Luger and backed away, finding the salvoda cover, and after that the wide dense expanse of cane and orchilla.

He dropped the Luger back in its holster, cursing in choice English, French and Congoese. He retraced his path, marked by bent grass and weeds. He stopped. There was a movement. He half drew his pistol—paused. His hand relaxed and came up empty. The girl, Hari-Minggu, was crouched on one knee, a little, snub-nosed pistol aimed straight at his chest.

"Why the gun?" he asked.

"You saw me following. You would kill me."

"I?" A short laugh shook Thebes' shoulders. "You've got us a little mixed up, haven't you, sweetheart?"

"You would have shot me with the Luger to keep me from telling of your visit, would you not, *Senhor*—Ammon."

"You're crazy."

"Why do you not say what you always used to? Why did you not say—'Little one, your brains rattle.' That is what you *used* to say."

"What are you getting at?"

She shrugged her slim, naked shoulders, *"Awak pandai? Says Pandai?"*

"If I was smart I wouldn't be here," Thebes said, answering her question.

She laughed at him over the barrel of the little gun.

"Well?" he demanded.

"You have learned to speak the language of my people rather well. Do not tell me you learned it from that tongueless black man of yours."

"So that's why you rattled the Malay at me first thing."

"And you answered so well. But no matter. A man might fool other men as you are doing, but never a woman." She touched her breast. "With a woman there is something in here that tells."

"You've informed Humphries, of course."

"Have I?"

"Stop playing cat and mouse."

"Had I told him, you would not now be here, alive."

He smiled.

She asked, "Are you of the British Colonial police?"

"No."

THEBES drew out a cigarette, struck a match. The flame seemed very bright after the long darkness. He carried it to the end of the cigarette, and with an unexpected slap of his left hand knocked the gun from Hari's fingers.

She screamed, diving for it. Thebes let her fingers close on it, then he twisted it away and dropped it in his pants pocket.

He laughed. "I never thought I'd get to be such a complete damned fool as to take guns away from women."

"You *lembu!* You *babi!"* she hissed with her young face gone feline from rage.

Thebes seized her arms, drew her towards him. She jerked back and forth a few times, then stood straight, her body rigid, her eyes meeting his.

He asked. "What's the matter? Are you afraid of me?"

"Ha!" she laughed.

"There are a hell of a lot of women who would be glad to wake up and find me in their *belik tidor* instead of that cheap killer, Rex Ammon."

Her lips twisted down at the corners. She asked, "What have you done? Have you killed him?"

"He died of blackwater."

She sucked in her breath, but there was no sudden terror, no sorrow in her face. She didn't look like a girl who had just learned that her beloved was dead.

He said, "You didn't care a damn for Rex Ammon."

"It was just that he promised me things."

"What things?"

She moved back and forth with little, shrugging movements, trying to pull herself free.

"He said he would take me to Laurenco Marques. He would buy me clothes. Like white woman. A *rambut-topi* with pearls instead of a flower for my hair. Diamond rings for my fingers—"

"And bells for your toes."

"Do not laugh! He would buy me the things I have always wanted. It is not easy for a woman not white to get such things."

"And when was he going to do all this?"

"As soon as this business was finished."

"That's why you came here and waited for him?"

"Yes."

"Maybe I'll buy you the same things."

Hari-Minggu crouched on one knee, a little, snub-nosed pistol aimed at his chest.

"You are lying. Just to keep me from going to Humphries. So I will not tell him who you are."

"You've forgotten. I have this now." He drew the little automatic and clicked the safety a few times. "Listen, kid. You have a secret. What would be the easiest way for me to get rid of that secret—for good?"

Her eyes kept darting to the pistol and back to his face. Thebes could feel the warmth of her young body through the sarong, and the rapid beat of her heart.

He laughed and put the pistol in his pocket. "Don't worry. I'm not going to kill you."

"Why?" she whispered.

"Because I'm a fool for a pretty woman."

"And because the guard would hear you shoot?"

He shook his head.

She said, "I perhaps like you too. I perhaps think you are also beautiful. And that is why I will not tell Humphries."

"You won't tell him, but that's not the reason."

"What then?" she asked, her voice teasing now that the fear of death had left her. "Why is it I will not tell him?"

"Because you want that *rambut-topi* with pearls." He changed the subject: "What the devil kind of business is Humphries doing here?"

"How would I know? I am but a woman. Rex told me nothing except that there is much wealth waiting as soon as there docked the steamhip *DeSilva*. I do not understand it."

"You understand well enough. Why is he holding those prisoners over there? Why was it necessary for Rex Ammon to travel a third of the distance across the continent of Africa to murder a couple of them who escaped?"

"If you would only walk with me. If you would let me go so I could think. . ."

"Sure."

He released her arms and turned to retrace the way through chin-high grass. She spun and plunged face downward. He made a grab for a bare ankle, but she had wriggled away. He could hear the crackle of grass as she ran toward the jungle.

He hurried toward the plantation house, fearing she would circle back and tell Humphries.

SOMEONE was on the lower veranda listening to a crackling wireless tuned to a Lourenço Marques transmitter. Thebes could not tell who it was through bamboo shutters, screen and vines. He circled, climbed the rear ladder.

The candle was still burning inside his room. He walked through, lifted the arch drapery to make sure no one was cached inside the sitting room. He jerked the portmanteau from beneath the bed, opened it, put in the full bottle of whisky. He stopped to listen, quickly blew out the candle.

Footsteps hurried around the veranda. There was a slap-slap of sandals, a tinkle of gold pieces. Hari-Minggu. She came to the door, opened it, and groped inside.

She sensed him there and drew up. "Ah—then you *are* here!"

"Right here waiting for you, chicken."

"I thought perhaps you would escape into the jungle."

"Why?"

"For fear I would tell Humphries you were not Ammon. I will not—believe me."

"Why did you run away out there?"

"Perhaps I was afraid you would kill me."

"Then why aren't you afraid now?"

"But I have *prove* myself now. Can you see that I have my chance and do not tell Humphries?"

"I wouldn't have shot you anyhow."

"Then perhaps you love little Hari? Perhaps you would take me to Lourenço Marques and buy me the *rambut-topi* with pearls and treat me like white woman?"

Her voice had a throaty huskiness. She was so close he could hear the small movements of her body beneath silk. The scent of her hair and the jasmine blossom in it combined and became a part of the warm, perfume-laden night. There was something of the opium dream about it all. He reached for a cigarette, then reconsidered and tossed it aside.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

She was so close he could feel the warmth of her breath against his neck.

"What was Rex Ammon to you?"

"Nothing."

"Just a *rambut-topi* and some pretty rocks at L.M.?"

"Only that!" she whispered. Then, after a wait, "You believe me?"

"I believe what I want to believe, and right now I'm willing to forget that Rex Ammon ever existed."

He seized her with sudden strength, and drew her to him. She came willingly. He kissed her. She tilted her head back and whispered. "You *will* buy me the *rambut-topi*—no?"

"Just as soon as you've earned it, kid."

Her fingers plucked at his shirt front. "Should you not button the throat?"

"Why?"

"Rex Ammon had a knife scar. It was pink colored and very easy to see."

"Humphries knew about it?"

"Of course. Sautel gave it to him in a fight."

"Over you?"

"Yes."

"Does Humphries suspect me?"

"Suspect that you are not Rex Ammon? A little, perhaps. But Sautel suspects. He keeps talking of it to Humphries."

"I'm not worried about Sautel."

"You *should* be."

"I'll take care of Sautel all right. Just tell me about those fellows down in the compound."

"I will tell you, *luang*. They were from Europe, going by airplane to South Africa. Or perhaps Rhodesia. They were trying to find farming land for their people—the Jews. The plane was forced down in the jungle, and they walked here. Tell me, do not these people of theirs have anywhere to go?"

"Why, that seems to be the current talk. Just go on with your story."

"I do not understand, but I have heard it said these few were very great among their people. Rich. And so Humphries has made them write many letters. He wants perhaps many to come, with gold and jewels to buy land. From a port called Cuxhaven."

"On the boat *DeSilva*?"

"Yes, on the *DeSilva*. Then two of them escaped. Men named Weissenberg and Kunz. He could not let them get a message to their homeland. That is why Rex Ammon had to follow, and silence them."

"What else?"

"You have heard all I know."

"And the *DeSilva* will unload her refugees down at Portamboko? Why, that's a malaria hole surrounded by jungle."

"I know only what I have told you. I do not understand the ways of white men."

"Neither do I," Thebes growled.

THE SLIGHT, moonlight glow marked the doorway was cut off by a man's shadow. Thebes thrust her away from him. He made no sound. He watched the shadow come to a stop and recoginzed Sautel.

Sautel opened the door and came in. There was an animal grace and softness in his step. The air was filled with the odor of the pomade he used on his hair. He moved suddenly as he sensed Thebes and the girl standing there. There was a sharp downward swing of his hand—

Thebes said, "Don't draw your gun."

Sautel backed a step, swinging both hands to show they were empty. Without turning, he spoke to a man outside.

"They're both here."

Humphries opened the door. "Well, light the candle."

Sautel fumbled through his pockets, found a mechanical lighter, snapped it to flame. The candle wick caught and climbed in a flickering tongue. The room seemed bright after the long darkness.

Humphries stood with red-freckled hands on his hips, smiling in his heavy-lipped manner.

"I say now, this intrusion is too bad. Devil of a thing to walk in like this, what?"

Thebes moved to bring his back against a corner near the archway. Sautel started as though to walk inside the sitting room.

"Stay where you were."

"You're fond of corners?" asked Humphries.

"I trust people I can see."

Sautel stopped and rubbed the palms of his soft, brown hands. He made no further move toward the sitting room.

Humphries chuckled. "The same old Rex Ammon! I say, you have a spirit about you. I've always admired—"

"What do you want?" Thebes asked.

The smile drifted from Humphries face. He seated himself on one of the chairs and bent forward a trifle.

"You were down at the compound a few minutes ago."

"I go wherever I damned please."

"Ammon—listen. You've been on edge ever since you got back. Looking for a fight. I told you I didn't want any—"

"That's not why you came here tonight."

Humphries rubbed his red stubble and thought for a while. He decided to be good-natured.

"Of course, I have an idea why you were down there. It was the little Jewish girl. *La femme fatale*, eh, Ammon? What is it you Americans say—'a cute little number'?" He lifted one eyebrow, rolled his eyes up at Hari, and laughed.

Thebes lighted a cigarette in the candle-flame, the close, red light bringing out the hard lines of his face. "Trying to get my eyes scratched out, Humphries?"

"Ah—no. I understand how it is. That

"I go wherever I damned please," Thebes said.

was the way I tried to explain it to the boy." He tilted his head at Sautel. "I told him you were only seeing the woman. But he is young. The young get—ideas. He keeps worrying. And you understand how bad it is for us to have suspicions of one another. You know the saying—'We must all hang together or—' "

"Get to the point."

"Well, yes. Right to the point. Bluntly, it's this—the boy does not really think you are Rex Ammon. Now wait! No violence. Let's look at it coldly. We're grown up, you and I. But the lad is, well—young."

"Some people die young," said Thebes around his cigarette.

"Exactly. The good die young, and that saves us all—what? But the boy is suspicious. We can't have suspicions here."

Thebes spoke in a velvety voice, not taking his eyes off Sautel: "So you want proof, is that it, punk? You want proof."

Sautel's downy smooth face was like a sulky child's; his eyes were intent as an adder's.

Thebes went on: "Now there might be several ways of giving proof. For instance, there's the matter of drawing a gun. Rex Ammon has some little reputation for getting his gun out—"

"No trouble, I said!" Humphries held up his hand. "I warn you, Nakassa is out on the veranda—"

"And you're in his line of fire."

Humphries moved from between Thebes and the door. "Take the chip off your shoulder. There's nothing unreasonable about the boy's request. All you have to do to satisfy him is to show him the scar on your chest."

Thebes seemed to consider it. He stamped out his cigarette. A smile twisted his lips. He commenced to laugh. For a moment the laugh sounded really amused, and then it went hard.

"Sure, Ammon, take off your shirt. The punk wants to see how his knife business is healing. Maybe you can take off your pants, too, so he can count the hair on your legs."

"Ammon, for God's sake—"

"Any time I take off my shirt for that half-woman punk—"

"Stop calling me names!" Sautel burst out. He turned to Humphries. "See? He has no scars. He isn't Ammon. Ammon never called me that name—"

"I've called you every name in the book."

Humphries snorted. "Oh, I say. This is a fool's business. Of course, if you're going to be stubborn about opening your shirt, I'll not insist on it." He jerked his head to Sautel. "Come along. Maybe a good night's sleep would help everyone's temper."

Humphries walked out, holding the door open for Sautel. Beyond, Thebes could see the shine of candlelight on Nakassa's copper ornaments. He followed to the door. Nakassa was holding the sub-machine gun by its two pistol grips, the short barrel angled toward the floor.

"Hello, Nakassa."

"Ah, *bwana.*" He exhaled as he spoke, giving his *"bwana"* a reverent sound.

Humphries and Sautel walked away with Nakassa following. He went back inside.

"You must not trust him!" said Hari.

"Who?"

"The native—Nakassa. There was another white man here when I first came. George Leachcraft. There was some quarrel with Humphries, and one day, without warning, Nakassa . . ." She shuddered.

"And Nakassa let him have it with the tommy-gun. Sure, he's not to be trusted. And maybe Humphries can't trust him, either. That wouldn't be so bad, chicken."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Just forget about it."

After the girl left, Thebes spent some time, balancing a whisky glass on the intruding top edge of the screen door so any slight movement would topple it. He moved his cot to a new position, fluffed the fresh dutchwife the houseboy had brought, and went to sleep almost instantly.

CHAPTER IV

A VISIT TO THE COMPOUND

THE SUN was shining when he woke up. The whisky glass still balanced on the door. Boleh-kah was outside pressing his truculent face close to the screen peering at him.

"Where the devil have you been?" Thebes asked.

Boleh-kah pointed toward the native huts.

"Anybody ask questions?"

Boleh-kah signed in the negative.

"Hell of a lot of good it would do them," said Thebes, taking down the whisky glass and motioning the black man inside.

Boleh-kah squatted on the floor, hunching forward, watching with red-rimmed eyes as Thebes stripped, poured water over his head, and dried himself. He put on new linen, and was combing his wet hair when Hari-Minggu came.

She said, "I ordered breakfast. You like it cassava and egg?"

"Sure." He mixed whisky and water for a morning *stengah*, downed it.

"Do you trust him—the tongueless man?" she asked while they were walking to the veranda table.

"Boleh-kah? I trust him not to talk."

The day passed without incident. Thebes spent siesta in his room. Night came. From the veranda his eyes swept what had once been Kembawe's formal garden. No one in sight, but the antics of some little green parrots told him that someone was hidden.

He sat in the darkness of the veranda, his position marked only by the glowing coal of his cigarette. A lighted window could be seen in the compound. Hari-Minggu came to him.

"Who is watching?" Thebes asked, gesturing in the general direction of the formal garden.

"I do not know."

"Is it Nakassa?"

"Perhaps. And others. He has many guns, *luang*."

Next afternoon Thebes saw Nakassa at the rear door. He lowered himself from

Boleh-kah squatted on the floor, watching him with red-rimmed eyes.

the veranda, not bothering with the stairs. Nakassa spun to face him.

"You were watching me last night," said Thebes.

Nakassa backed up a step or two. He had left his sub-machine gun somewhere, and its absence made him uncomfortable. Thebes put him at ease by smiling.

Nakassa said, "Yes. Me watch."

"Humphries told you to?"

Nakassa made an affirmative sign.

"And if I left house? You would saw me in half with that gun?"

"No, *bwana.*" A chuckle made a gurgling in the native's throat. "I do not shoot. If you are dead you pay me no more escudos."

Thebes laughed so hard that moisture appeared in the outer corners of his eyes. "We're *bamingas* then. And that's putting it on a damned practical basis, too." He slipped a hundred-escudo note in the band of Nakassa's pants. "There'll be another of those tomorrow. And one the day after. And so on, just as long as we stay *bamingas.*"

Nakassa smiled.

"Where will you be watching tonight?"

"From the back, master. From among the three khaya trees."

"I'll visit you."

"And if he should follow. *Boss-bondele,* or *bwana* Sautel?"

"You'll just tell me about it."

Thebes waited out the hours of afternoon and evening. Darkness. He lowered himself from the rear veranda and walked to the khaya trees. Nakassa's black body was invisible in the deep shadow, but light from somewhere made little metallic reflections from the gun and the copper ornaments.

"Come along," said Thebes. "To the compound."

They walked directly toward the front gate. Halfway across the beaten area, a guard stepped forward, giving his rifle bolt a warning rattle.

"Open the gate," said Thebes.

"No."

Nakassa advanced a step. "Do you not hear *bondele* say 'open gate?'"

The guard was frightened. He retreated, shaking his head.

"No. *Boss-bondele,* him say don' open gate for anybody. Not even other *bondele* don' open . . ."

Thebes followed him, hands on hips, eyes intent. "Open the gate!" he barked.

"No."

Thebes was close. The guard decided to make a stand. He swung his rifle around. Thebes seized the barrel, twisted it aside. The native clung fast, and Thebes jerked him forward. The rifle went off, sending a high-velocity charge off into the dark. Thebes' fist connected, smashing him to the ground.

The guard rested on hips and elbows, shaking his head. Nakassa stepped forward, pressing the machine gun muzzle against his temple.

"Never mind," said Thebes.

Nakassa reluctantly removed his finger from the trigger.

Thebes nudged the guard with his toe. "Did you hear my words? I have told him not to shoot. I have saved your life. That makes your life belong to me."

"Yes, *bondele.*"

"I'm going inside the stockade. If anybody asks, you saw nobody. You shoot gun by mistake."

"Yes, *bondele.*"

Thebes picked up the rifle. A Mauser. He drew out the clip of cartridges and dropped it in his pocket. Then he strode on to the gate.

IT WAS held on the outside by a bar of heavy panga-panga wood. He lifted the bar, dragged the gate open. The house had black and white contrast in starlight. Its roof was overhanging thatch tied in bundles and held in place by bamboo poles, its walls were whitewashed mud-brick. A grease lamp burned inside.

He followed a cobble path across the grassless yard and was nearly to the door before noticing the person who stood by a straggly thorn bush. He turned, allowing lamplight to strike the side of his face.

"Ah—you!"

He was surprised to hear a woman's voice. It took a bit of looking to pick out her form from the shadow.

She was twenty-two or so. Her face was handsome, cut sharply with the firm bonal structure of the Asia-Minor races. The slim, smooth lines of her shoulders were covered more by her dark hair than by the dress she wore which was in tatters. She was small, extremely slim-waisted.

"What do *you* want?" She came down heavily on the "you," making it plain that there had been a previous visit, and that it had been distasteful to her.

"You think I'm Rex Ammon."

She laughed bitterly.

"I'm not. My name is Craig Thebes. Ammon is dead. I helped bury him. If you'd let me, maybe I'd help you out of this mess."

She walked close, studying his face. "Shaving that mustache doesn't fool me."

"It fooled Humphries."

Someone opened the door. A hunched man of fifty was looking out.

"Naomi!"

"Here I am, father."

"Who are you talking to?"

He had a slight German or Dutch accent.

"A visitor. He *says* his name is Thebes."

The hunched man came outside, walking barefoot over the cobbles in a manner which showed he had gone without shoes for many weeks. His beard was grizzled and inches long, making him look like a character who had stepped from the Book of Isaiah.

He walked up, looking intently into Thebes' face. At last he nodded.

"It is true, my dear. He is *not* Ammon."

Two other men were at the door. The light was at their backs, preventing Thebes from seeing their faces. They said nothing—just stood, listening.

The hunched man asked, "Why are you here?"

"I had an idea of helping you."

The man made a little, eager start. "You are of the police?"

"No. I'm just a jungle tramp."

"But why—"

"Why?" Thebes laughed—an easy laugh that made a strange sound on the tense air. "There are still a few people in the world who take no pleasure in mass murder, no matter how the members of your race have come to doubt it. What do you say we go inside and talk it over?"

"Shon, be careful!" One of the men stepped from the door. He was young, with wavy hair and beard. "This may be only another of their tricks."

Shon—the hunched man—held up his hand in a plea for reason.

"Let us not flatter ourselves. There is no need for anyone tricking us. Does the master trick his willing ox? He only goads him. We have obeyed every command. Perhaps this man is telling the truth. But anyway, what can we lose by trusting him?"

He bowed courteously. "Please forgive us, *Mynheer* Thebes. You cannot blame us for being suspicious. Won't you go inside?"

Thebes walked inside the house. He was in a small, low-ceilinged room which still held the heat of day. The dirt floor was covered by ragged mattings. Furniture consisted of ten rattan chairs and a table with pottery dishes still strung around.

Shon moved one of the chairs a few inches. Thebes sat down, sprawling his long legs, taking in the misery of the room with one glance.

Shon said, "Now, you were saying . . ."

"I guess you want to know how I come to be here."

"Yes."

"I was Ammon's friend. An acquaintance of his, anyway. I found him down with the blackwater over in the Bamkula country. He died. Shortly afterward an Arab assassin turned up with a wooden container addressed to Humphries. He mistook me for Ammon. I gathered that Ammon was on the trail of lots of money. So I thought I'd play my luck and see if I could fool this fellow Humphries too. Understand me, Shon, I'm not a crusader. I'm not even honest. I wouldn't snub a bit of poaching, or smuggling, or even a spot of genteel larceny if there were some long escudo notes in it. But shaking down homeless people and dumping them off into a malaria-rotten jungle port to shift for themselves is a little strong for my digestion. So here I am."

SHON nodded with a sharp bob of his head, turned, and strode the room. He looked around at the others. "He is telling the truth. We must believe him. It is our only hope." Then to Thebes, "I have heard from the guard that Kunz and Weissenberg were both killed."

"He told you the truth."

"Neither of them had a chance to send a message to Bulawayo or Johannesburg?"

"I doubt it."

Shon exhaled sadly. He seated himself in the other rattan chair, carefully lifting

the knees of his ragged pants as though to preserve their press. "Ah, yes. First it was Kamanski. He was shot before he got a hundred meters from the wall. Next Kunz and Weissenberg." He met Thebes' gaze. "You have an idea to help us escape?"

"That wouldn't be enough. I wouldn't even have risked my neck coming here tonight if it were just saving the four of you. There's something else. The steamboat *DeSilva* is about due to drop a cargo of refugees in some jungle sinkhole down the Mozambique coast. There'll be a lot of women and kids in that bunch. We'll have to act fast to save them."

"Then Humphries' plan has been successful?"

Thebes nodded.

Shon struck his head with the heel of his hand. "If we could but get word to the Governor-General in Lourenço Marques!"

"Perhaps, or we could write to Santa Claus."

"What do you mean?"

"The Governor-General wouldn't believe you. And even if he did, he'd do nothing about it. When a Portugee gets a political job like Governor-General of a jungle colony he concentrates on two things—siesta and brandy. That's exactly the reason Humphries chose Mozambique as the place to dump them."

"But he would have to listen. These people, these refugees—"

Thebes laughed. Shon looked at him, lowered his head again and rocked sadly.

"We *must* stop them," he muttered at the floor.

"Well, Shon, you had one hell of a good idea for getting them here. I'd think you could turn up with a better plan for keeping them away."

The girl spoke sharply, "That's unfair! We did only what we had to do to save our lives. He'd have tortured us if we hadn't given him the names of the refugee leaders. After getting them, the rest was easy. The European leaders have to work underground to escape the English since that Palestine trouble. They even stop ships on the high seas—"

"My dear!" Shon held up his hand.

Thebes said, "So you saved your own necks at the expense of those others."

"That's not fair!" she cried.

Thebes shrugged. "We have to look at everything through our own eyes, sister."

Shon nodded. "*Mynheer* Thebes, of course, is right. We have committed a great wrong in allowing Humphries to dictate to us even though it would have meant our death otherwise. And now we must rectify it." He turned to Thebes. "There is something, *Mynheer*, that I have not told you."

"No!" The girl sprang to his side, pulling his shoulder. "You do not know this man—"

"I do not. But we must trust him."

"What haven't you told me?" barked Thebes. "Damn it all, I have to get out of here before they miss me at the plantation house."

"My name is not Shon. My name is Waxman. Ludwig S. Waxman. Does that name mean anything to you?"

"Not a damned thing."

"Not even if you associated it with the Waxman Tool Company of Amsterdam, and the Waxman Consolidated Mines of South Africa?"

Thebes sat straighter and whistled softly. "You're *the* Waxman. And you never told them."

"Of course I could not tell that pink-faced swine at the plantation house. He would demand millions in ransom. He would break my concern."

A mirthless laugh jolted Thebes' shoulders. "And so you chose instead to let him go through with the refugee scheme. Isn't that saving your concern the hard way, Waxman?"

"You are wrong. It was not selfish of me. Can't you see? It would only make it worse if they learned my identity? Think of the people who would come through the recommendation of Ludwig S. Waxman. Hear me, Thebes! If I can save those poor people through casting my entire fortune into the sea, I will gladly do it."

"Forget it. I left five thousand dollars' worth of copal over on the Congo side to come on this fool's safari, and I wanted to blame somebody else. Actually I'm getting what I damned well deserve."

"But now you must agree that a message from me to the Governor-General—"

"Sure, he'd turn handsprings right out of his hammock for your kind of dough."

"Then you think—"

"I think we'd better get ready to leave."

"Tonight?"

"Cool off, Waxman. There was a little

disturbance out there when the guard got trigger-itchy. Humphries might decide to snoop around. Anyway, we need a canoe and a crew of good paddlers for the trip downriver. I don't want to go off half-cocked. Tomorrow night, maybe, or the night after."

"You'll send word to us?"

"If I can."

CHAPTER V

A MILLION POUNDS STERLING

THE area around the compound seemed deserted when Thebes stepped through the gate. He paused in shadow to look around. No movement or sound. Only some native cymbals being banged in the village.

He walked swiftly through starglow and found the guard sitting on his heels, the rifle in his hands.

"Where's Nakassa?"

"Him go." The guard pointed, native fashion, with elongated lips. "Him follow woman—"

"What woman?"

"Woman from big house."

"You'll tell no one I was here."

"No, master."

"I'm *boss-bondele* now. Remember—*boss-bondele!*" He drew a couple of ten-escudo pieces from his pocket and handed them to him. "Don't talk. Then tomorrow two more."

Thebes took the path through high grass, watching for Nakassa and Hari-Minggu. He circled the plantation house, and approached it from the rear.

Nakassa's voice startled the dark—"*Bwana?*"

"Yes."

He caught movement close against the rear of the building. Nakassa had seized Hari-Minggu, one powerful arm was around her waist, a hand was clapped over her mouth.

Thebes asked, "What happened?"

"She follow. She would go to *boss-bondele,* maybe. But I catch her. Perhaps I should strangle her."

"Let her go."

Nakassa held her for eight or ten seconds, his eyes staring at Thebes. Then, with a reluctant movement, he released her. She spun away, spitting the taste of his hand from her lips.

Nakassa had seized Hari-Minggu, one powerful arm around her waist.

"Take it easy, chicken," Thebes said.

She turned on him in feline anger. "Why were you down there in the compound? Ha! It was like Humphries say—the other woman—"

"He was just trying to rile you up."

"No. You tried to see her las' night. And now again—"

"Close that sweet mouth or Nakassa will close it for you."

She made a hissing sound through her teeth, looking with revulsion at the big native. "So you trust him! There have been others who trusted him. But he killed them. He is like a cobra. He will stay peacefully in his basket just so long, and then he strikes. And he will kill you!"

Nakassa grunted, prodded at her with the muzzle of the sub-machine gun. Hari-Minggu backed to the corner of the house. Nakassa's finger was touching the trigger. She saw it, and her voice sprang from her throat in piercing terror.

Her scream startled Nakassa, making his finger tense on the trigger. There was a fragmentary hesitation and Thebes batted aside the barrel. The gun roared to life, hammering a stream of bullets to the ground.

The discharge lasted less than a second.

Hari-Minggu was gone. Thebes could hear the tinkle of gold pieces as she ran. Men shouted inside the house. Someone trotted heavily along the upper veranda.

"I should break your damned neck," Thebes hissed.

"I did not mean to shoot, *bwana*. Woman scream make Nakassa shoot . . ."

Nakassa freed the gun from Thebes' grasp and backed away, unexpectedly ramming the wall.

Thebes said, "You wait here. When Humphries asks, tell him you fired by mistake."

Nakassa commenced replacing the spent cartridges, watching with small, truculent eyes as Thebes climbed the veranda ladder.

Thebes stood for a moment looking around. Hari-Minggu was talking in a high-pitched, unintelligible voice downstairs. He walked to the front, descended the stairs, and looked inside the big room.

Hari was crouched on one knee, her teeth bared from pain as Humphries twisted her arm.

"Talk!" he was saying. "Tell me why you screamed. Tell me what that shooting was."

Thebes walked in. "She was sneaking around, and Nakassa bounded a little bit of lead to scare her. What the hell, Humphries, is the quinine getting your nervous system?"

Humphries kept his grip on her wrist as he turned his head to look at Thebes.

"So. You have come back."

"From where?"

"You were not in your room. You must have been someplace."

"I told you once I would go where I damned pleased. Now let the girl alone."

Humphries remained as he was. A smile twisted his heavy mouth.

"Turn her loose!" barked Thebes.

Humphries said, "If you'll trouble yourself to look around, you will notice a gun pointed at your back."

Thebes turned. Sautel was standing at one side of the door, his automatic in his hand, aiming it.

"Well, so it's come to this."

Sautel did not answer, but satisfaction showed in his boyish-smooth face.

Humphries chuckled, releasing the girl. She drew away, rubbing the abused flesh of her wrist.

"Answer me now, Thebes—you have been in the compound visiting the prisoners. That's true, isn't it?"

"You seem to know."

"Yes, I do know. One of the natives saw you. He heard the gunshot and came here. I suppose you killed the guard."

"No."

"Why did you go there?"

"That's my business."

"Ammon—when I ask a question I want an answer."

Sautel spoke in raised voice: "He's *not* Ammon. I have told you from the first he is not Ammon. He is a spy . . ."

Sautel crouched forward. He snapped off the safety. There was no chance for Thebes to get his Luger, even though he was sure Sautel intended to shoot. Humphries was springing from the line of fire. For a fraction of time Thebes was safe. He swept up a hardwood chair and flung it.

The chair caught Sautel waist-high. It slammed the automatic against his body. Thebes' hand raked up with the Luger.

His brain seemed to explode.

HE OPENED his eyes. He was down with the room buzzing around him. Humphries was standing over him, an Enfield revolver in one hand, Thebes' Luger in the other.

Thebes sat up, shaking pain from his head.

"Next time I'll use the other end of the gun, you know," Humphries was saying.

Thebes made it up. He held the top of the big, teak table. Sautel had booted the chair to one side and crouched forward with automatic ready.

Thebes said, "If you let that punk shoot me, it'll be the worst fool act of your life."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what you think I mean. I mean if he bumps me, he'll also bump some information you could turn into millions."

"You talk in big figures."

"You're damned right I do."

"Don't listen to him!" Sautel walked forward, the automatic trembling a trifle. "I wanted to kill him the first day. And I'll do it now before it's too late—"

"You'll do as I tell you. Put the gun down."

Sautel lowered the barrel a few degrees.

Humphries reached for the front of Thebes' shirt, gave it a jerk, snapping the buttons and leaving his chest naked.

"Your scar did heal rather well, didn't it, Ammon?"

Thebes laughed.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Craig Thebes."

"Police."

"Of course not."

"What then?"

"Just a jungle tramp trying to turn up a few pounds sterling."

"Aren't we all? What happened to Ammon?"

"Dead of the blackwater."

"And you took his place. Oh I say, this is topping! And you were smart enough not to grow a mustache, knowing we'd blame it on that if you didn't quite ring true."

"I thought I did a fair job."

"Indeed yes. A capital job, old fellow. You might even have come through it and taken us all to prison if it hadn't been for a spot of jealousy and that scar."

"I told you I wasn't of the police."

"And perhaps you are telling the truth. That's what makes it so hard to have to kill you. You might be as valuable to us as poor Rex, but you see how it is. I wouldn't dare take the chance. It wouldn't be clever."

Thebes grinned from the side of his mouth. Blood kept seeping down from the gun-bruise in his hair, and he kept swabbing it off.

"And still you're a damned fool, Humphries."

"So?"

"Sure. I'll tell you something—those fellows in the compound think I'm here to help them. You see, I had my suspicions. I've been around in South Africa a bit, and I remember the picture of notables I see in the papers."

"What are you getting around to?"

"Just this—it would knock that House-of-Lords accent of yours bally well out of your British mouth if you found out who Shon really is."

Humphries leaned forward a trifle. "Bluffing?"

"No. I just don't want to be killed. I wasn't figuring on telling you, Humphries. I planned on letting you take the peanuts for this boatload of draggle-tailed refugees, and then to hell with you. I'd cash in on Shon all by myself."

Humphries rubbed his red-stubbled jaw. He was smiling a little, trying to read Thebes' eyes.

Sautel edged forward. "Don't listen to him. Can't you see he's only stalling for time?"

"I can see as much as you can, and I'll thank you to keep your nose where it belongs."

Sautel sulked backward a step. Now and then he glanced over at Hari, who was curled in a chair, looking from one man to the other, caressing her wrist.

Humphries asked, "Well, who is he if not Shon?"

"Ludwig Waxman."

Humphries stopped breathing. Five or six seconds ticked by.

"He's the diamond man from Jungfontein?"

"Sure."

Humphries exhaled. He licked his lips.

Sautel raised his voice. "You're not believing that liar?"

"Of course I don't believe him. But I'd be a fool if I didn't find out for sure."

"He's bluffing—"

"Shut up!" Humphries walked to the door and called for the houseboy. "Bring Nakassa."

Nakassa was there in less than ten seconds.

Humphries said, "Get the prisoners. Take a couple of your men down with you, and be damned sure nobody gets away."

Nakassa bowed, backing from the door. "Me get."

HUMPHRIES walked nervously around the room. He was on edge. He rolled a cigarette mixing a double pinch of native *bangh* with the tobacco. He lighted and inhaled. The opiate seemed to agitate him still further. He turned suddenly on Thebes.

"If you're lying—"

Thebes laughed. "What'll you do then, kill me twice?"

Humphries kept striding the room.

Thebes asked, "But what if I *am* telling the truth?"

"Why, that's a point I haven't quite decided."

"I know considerable about the Waxman corporate setup. That might be pretty useful when it comes to squeezing the old pounds sterling out of them."

"Oh I say, Thebes! Rex Ammon was never in a class with you. I can't see how I ever confused you. Even though we have to let air through that hide of yours, I will carve the fact on your tombstone."

"Much obliged."

There was a sound of feet on cobbles, and in a few seconds the prisoners were herded inside the room.

Humphries watched Waxman's face as he came in range of the petrol lamp.

"Sorry to disturb you." Humphries bowed and rubbed his palms. He lifted one of the chairs a few inches and spoke to Naomi, "My dear, won't you sit down? Our hospitality is not ornate, but sincere."

The girl did not glance at the chair. Her eyes were on Craig Thebes.

Humphries went on: "I would not have disturbed you, only a matter of great importance has come up." He bowed and said with a fine sense of drama, "You will excuse us, Mr. *Waxman?*"

Waxman flinched at sound of his name. His eyes knifed over to Thebes, and returned to Humphries.

"Certainly," he answered.

"You swine!" Naomi hissed at Thebes. "You yellow cur."

Thebes smiled thoughtfully and felt for his cigarettes. He had none left, so he walked to Sautel and snapped his fingers. Sautel made no responding movement. His onyx eyes seemed particularly unflinching and vicious in his womanish face. Thebes reached in his pocket, took out a cigarette, lighted it. He then said to Naomi, "Weren't you foolish in expecting honor from any of us?"

Humphries chuckled. "Oh I say, Thebes. Haven't we our own brand of honor?"

Naomi asked, "Honor among thieves?"

Humphries said, "Criminations have no point here. We understand one another. You at least, Waxman—you must certainly recognize your position. The refugee business has suddenly become what my American friend there calls 'peanuts.' You have been here perhaps five months. We have gone to no small expense in providing for you. I do not believe it would be outrageous to make a small charge for your food and lodgings since you have proved to be a person of bountiful means. What do you say to that, Waxman? You're an intelligent man."

"What *is* there to say?" he answered quietly.

"Now, that is what I call an excellent attitude. I'm relieved to find you coming around to my way of thinking so quickly." Humphries was having a good time, striding back and forth, rocking on the balls of his feet, his eyes shifty and bright from the *bangh* he had smoked. "Ah—Waxman, your diamond holdings are substantial, are they not?"

"Most substantial." Waxman hunched forward a little more than usual, hands clasped, eyes following Humphries back and forth across the room. "They are also involved. Modern systems of corporate ownership do not simplify the liquidation of such holdings, if you plan on bleeding me white."

Humphries stopped his pacing. His heavy mouth sagged at the corners, brutalizing his face.

"You're telling me that you can't get your hands on your own money. I'm sure you'll be able to find a way, Waxman. Because if you don't . . ."

"If I don't, then you will kill me? Is that it?"

"No. I won't kill you. But I can't say exactly what will happen to your daughter."

Waxman must have been prepared for these words, but he flinched anyway and turned a shade paler.

"I warn you, if I should die there is no conceivable way by which you can get a shilling from my concern."

Thebes spoke: "Nor you, either, Waxman."

Waxman faced him. "You tricked us cleverly enough, sir. I perceived that you were not Ammon, but another man resembling him. It was a clever trick that won my confidence. But even so I may fool you."

Thebes had seated himself in one of the rattan chairs. He could see Nakassa watching through the screen. Hari-Minggu was in another chair, feet folded under her, dark, intense eyes watching the other woman.

Humphries said, "Forgive me for calling your attention to it, Waxman, but you

don't seem to be in a position for fooling anyone."

"Naomi is not my daughter. She is my secretary."

Thebes laughed, jolting smoke from his mouth. "In other words, we can torture her and be damned."

"I didn't say that. I meant that I could leave her behind with less grief."

Humphries growled, "What are you getting at?"

"This. Should you attempt to torture any of us, I will commit suicide."

With a quick, defensive movement, Waxman thrust the blade against his throat, just over the jugular.

WAXMAN stood unusually straight. He moved a trifle to keep the teak table between himself and Humphries, reached beneath his tattered shirt, and drew a short machete. It was one of those ten-franc trade knives common to the tropics, but its cheap steel blade was honed to a keen edge.

Humphries took a step, but with a quick defensive movement, Waxman thrust the blade against his throat just over the jugular.

Naomi screamed—a sudden, piercing sound. Sautel leveled his automatic at Waxman. Thebes sprawled in his chair, watching the scene from under droopy lids.

"Why don't you go ahead and shoot him, Sautel?"

"I should shoot *you.*"

"Shut up!" barked Humphries. Then to Waxman, his tone conciliatory, "Come to your senses, man. I have no intention of harming you—not any of you. A few pounds sterling—it would be nothing to a fortune like yours. What is death compared to a little money."

Waxman spoke in a high, nervous voice, the blade still pressed to his throat: "Hold me if you want. But free the others. All of them. Now. They will do nothing that might lead to my death. They will know how to obtain the money and ransom me."

"But of course, such a thing can be arranged. One must be sensible. I do not want you to die. When I am paid, then I will turn you free. It would not be to my advantage to cause the death of so

notable a man as you, Mr. Waxman. His Majesty's Government would hunt me to the ends of the earth."

Humphries had reached the corner of the table. Waxman's back was towards Sautel, his elbow was raised stiffly high, the keen blade was pressed against his throat.

Humphries darted a glance at Sautel. Sautel crouched forward, the automatic in the palm of his hand. Waxman backed a trifle. He was only four or five long strides from Sautel.

Sautel started forward, ready to swing the automatic to Waxman's head. Thebes slid down a little, thrusting one foot out. Sautel tripped, sprawling face forward.

Thebes sprang, trying to pounce on his back. Sautel was quick. He rolled, twisting the pistol around. Thebes leaped up, swinging his foot. The automatic went skittering across the floor mattings.

Sautel rolled to hands and feet. He reached. A dagger glimmered as it was drawn from the back of his shirt collar. Thebes set his heels and swung a right to Sautel's jaw.

Sautel's head snapped back, slapping pomaded hair over his face. He reeled, bumping the table, rebounded, went forward on bended knees, eyes staring at off angles. Thebes met him with bent knee on his way down.

Waxman had spun around, his eyes wild. The bearded young prisoner seized the opportunity and dived through a mosquito-netted window.

Humphries started as though to follow, and stopped. Waxman cried, "Why do you not follow him, *Mynheer* Master Criminal?"

Humphries spat obscenities. In wrath, spittle appeared at the corners of his mouth. He had drawn his Enfield revolver to cover Thebes and the rest. He stopped his cursing and bent a malevolent gaze on Sautel who was beginning to twitch with consciousness.

"Get up!" he snarled.

The command seemed to filter to Sautel's slugged brain. He struggled up, eyes baffled, arms hanging limp with the hairless backs of his hands forward.

"Get your gun."

Sautel moved towards it. He tripped and spilled face down. His groping fingers closed on the butt. He got up, shaking his head, wiping oily hair from his eyes.

Humphries said, "So he escaped, and the game is up. You played it well. So well I have nothing left but to kill you. It is too bad."

He moved aside, glancing over his shoulder at the blackness of the veranda doorway where a gleam of gunmetal marked Nakassa's position.

Thebes suddenly laughed. The sound of it jarred Humphries a bit.

"You have found something humorous about death?"

"In this case, yes."

"I say, Thebes, a man has to admire you a bit."

"Sure. Admire me all you damned please."

With a careless movement Thebes drew a half-dozen hundred-escudo notes and tossed them on the table.

He cried, "Fire!"

The veranda darkness was sliced by yellow flame. The roar of multiple explosions pounded the inside of the room. Humphries was batted by triphammer blows going face down.

At the final second, Sautel seemed to have sensed what was taking place. He fired wildly in the direction of Thebes, and drove shoulder first toward a veranda window. The bamboo jalousies were down and tangled him for a second. He fought his way outside, but Nakassa stepped back to cut him down with a second volley from the Austen.

THEBES walked across to look down on Humphries. "The poor damned fool. Thought he was on top of the earth, and he didn't have a chance."

Waxman found his voice. "I don't understand."

"Why, Nakassa is a hired killer, and a hired killer naturally works for the man who pays him most."

"Then you really are—"

"I have no intention of holding you for ransom, if that's what you're still worried about."

"We are free?" Waxman seemed ready to weep.

Thebes shrugged. "There's a boatload of refugees waiting to get dumped in some malaria hole along the Mozambique coast that came here on your recommendation, don't forget that. I'd say that a man with

that sort of responsibility wasn't exactly 'free.' But you can suit yourself. It's none of my concern."

"I will see to it they get good homes, believe me!" said Waxman fervently. "I will use my last resource to insure their safety."

Thebes hooked his thumb at Naomi. "Your daughter?"

"No. I was telling the truth. She's my secretary."

Naomi came forward, laying a slim hand on Thebes' shoulder. "Forgive me. That thing I said—"

"Don't make it any tougher for me than it is already."

He walked to Hari-Minggu, squeezed her chin between thumb and forefinger. "Listen, chicken, get that look out of your eyes. A man is flattered by a little jealousy, but there comes a time when he's forced to slap it out of a woman. And I don't feel like any more of the rough-tough tonight."

Nakassa stalked in, the machine gun angled toward the ceiling. He gathered the escudo notes and thrust them in the pocket of his filthy pants. He heard Thebes' words to Hari-Minggu and walked over, swinging the gun barrel threateningly. "You mind what *boss-bondele* say, woman."

Hari came close to Thebes, looking up at him, pressing her chin in the hollow beneath his collarbone.

"You do not love that other woman, *luang*?"

"Of course not, chicken."

"And you will take me to Laurenco Marques?"

"Sure."

Waxman asked, "Thebes—you know the way from the jungle? You will guide us there—to Laurenço Marques?"

"For a consideration."

"Money?"

"You have the general idea."

"Believe me, sir, I will pay any sensible amount."

Hari-Minggu said, "Have him pay *much* money. Enough for a *rambut-topi* with pearls, and diamonds for my fingers . . ."

"Sure," grinned Thebes. "A few little things like that."

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ILLUSTRATED BY
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DO NOT MOLEST THE MIRACLES

On the very eve of Johnny Smith Day, the house had burned down.

By
SAMUEL W.
TAYLOR

WHEREAS, there have been some miracles at Greene Corners; and, WHEREAS, the Government is trying to horn in on a purely local affair; and,

WHEREAS, we, the Town Council of Greene Corners, are fully capable of handling our own miracles and deplore the prospect of said miracles being flooded with edicts, directives, orders and regulations from some hastily appointed Board of Wonders, Rural Phenomenon Section, Office of the Regional Director for Supernatural Affairs; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, to forward full statement of facts regarding said miracles to the Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel, Member of Congress, Third District, with the earnest petition that said Zachery Z. Satchel use his every effort and influence toward leaving well enough alone.

Statement of Facts
Prepared by Chas. C. Greene
Chairman of Town Council,
Greene Corners

I learned of the first miracle on the morning of Tuesday the 16th, inst. In walking from my home on Sequoia Street to the Greene Drug Store, of which I am proprietor, I found the street of our fair city deserted. I did not particularly remark this circumstance for two reasons: (1) very often our fair city might appear

practically deserted to the casual glance, and (2) I had something else on my mind.

As chairman of the Johnny Smith Day committee, it had been my unfortunate duty the previous night to cancel the parade, the band concert, and even my own speech, scheduled for this day, Tuesday the 16th, inst. Johnny Smith is, as no doubt the Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel is aware, our fair city's number one war hero.

We had, at the time Johnny Smith was awarded the Medal of Honor, discussed the matter of a statue. But, as was pointed out in council meeting, a young fellow with a wife and child to support might be more appreciative of a useful token of our gratitude, and so it was voted to present him with a nice little house instead. This was done, and on his return Johnny moved in with his wife and child and with becoming modesty resumed his college studies, his education having been interrupted during his freshman year.

And this year, on the very eve of Johnny Smith Day, the house had burned down. It was commonly supposed that his boy, Achaemenes, a manly little fellow of five, had been playing with matches. So it was my sad duty under the circumstances to cancel the scheduled celebration, including my speech.

WITH these sad thoughts I stopped at Clem's Cafe for breakfast on my way to the drug store. The cafe was locked. I went across the street to the Eagle Cafe, and it was locked. I went home, prepared coffee and toast, ate, and on my way back to the drug store noticed that every store in our fair city was locked.

Thinking that news of the cancellation of the ceremonies had somehow not been circulated (though everybody had been to the fire), or had been misunderstood, I began phoning the various members of the town council from the drug store. The phones were not answered. I called the newspaper and nobody was there.

At this juncture Tall Harmon came in. Tall Harmon, as the Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel might be aware, is somewhat of a philosopher in our fair city, though unfortunately addicted to ardent spirits. I said, "Morning, Tall," and he gave me the first intimation that something extraordinary had happened with this statement: "Give me a bromo, quick," he stated.

Somewhat surprised, for Tall never takes a bromo before noon, I prepared one. His hands shook and the glass chattered against his teeth. He asked for another, drank it, and went out. A few minutes later he returned, asked for another, drank it, and stated, "I'll never drink another drop, Chas. It's still there."

"That's good news," I stated.

"It's a miracle," he stated.

"It certainly is," I stated, assuming he referred to the square egg which a hen belonging to Clem Shanks had laid the previous day. Clem had put the egg in the window of his cafe.

"It wasn't there yesterday," Tall stated.

"It *was* there yesterday," I stated.

"Yes, the other one. But it burned down," he stated.

"What are you talking about?"

"The miracle," he stated, "what do you think? Where do you suppose everybody is at? It's Johnny Smith's new house."

"You mean everybody's up helping clear away the debris? Why wasn't I told of this?"

"That's what you get for leaving your phone off the hook at night," Tall stated. "Johnny Smith's house growed back up again."

"Tall," I stated, "such jokes are in poor taste."

"I mean it," he stated. "That house growed back up again overnight. What do you think I drunk three bromos for?"

"Tall, I saw the ruins with my own eyes."

"Yes, and I saw the new house with *mine*. And the whole town's up there gawping at it."

"You mean the house is there exactly the way it was before it burned down?"

"Not exactly the same. In fact it's a half-timbered house now instead of frame, and it's about three times as big as it was before it burned down. That's what gets me, Chas. If it grew back up, why didn't it grow back the way it was? That's the unnatural part of it all. It's enough to give you the creeps. What if it keeps on growing every night? Be a castle pretty quick. In one night it's already the size of some of those guest houses on those big Daleborough estates."

"As chairman of the Town Council and of the Johnny Smith Day committee it seems to me I might have been notified of something like this," I stated, "phone off the hook or no."

Tall drove me out in his car. Johnny Smith's place was at the edge of our fair city on Poplar Street, which was named for the trees planted along it by the pioneers. Tall had to park three blocks away because of all the cars, and we walked to the house. Where yesterday afternoon had been charred wreckage, there was now a two-story house built of heavy black beams with the spaces between filled with brick and plaster. There were diamond-pane windows of leaded glass, a big oak door studded with brass bolt heads, and a massive brick chimney.

"Run forty thousand bucks if it cost a dime," Tall stated. "I guess it makes you feel cheap, that little frame cheesebox you donated to the town hero. You know, Chas," he said musingly, "I wouldn't be at all surprised if the whole thing isn't a miracle. Yep, figure it that way and it makes sense. I mean, the burning and all. Johnny Smith deserved something better than that little cheesebox, and there it is."

AS I pushed through the crowd for a closer look I noticed a baffling detail. While our fair city has the richest soil in the world, it is of the type known as black adobe which turns to gumbo when wet. The heavy rains of the previous week had soaked the earth, and our attempts to put out the fire, combined with the water from the hoses, had left Johnny Smith's lawn and flower beds a sea of churned gumbo. Yet now there was not only no sign of the fire but the lawn was smooth as a billiard table, shrubs were growing at the foundation, a pair of tall yews flanked the oak door, and flower beds blazed with bloom.

"This *is* Poplar Street," I said, half doubting my senses.

"If you're nuts, Chas," Tall stated cheerfully, indicating the crowd, "you got company."

I crossed the lawn to look at those flowers. They were real, not only blooming but bedded in nice sandy loam of a type that some people hauled in from the Daleborough district for such purposes.

"Hey, Chas, get off that lawn!" Hack Kitchen yelled at me. Hack, as the Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel might remember,

Where yesterday had been charred wreckage, there was now a two-story house.

is the police force of Greene Corners. "You're no better than nobody else. Let you go trampling around and then it's somebody else, and first thing you know the place looks as bad as it did yesterday."

Realizing my position as a prominent citizen and an example to others, I got off the lawn. Hack Kitchen was measuring something between the big poplars. "Nope," Hack stated, folding his rule, "it wasn't that way."

"Which way?" I asked.

"Well, Chas, it stands to reason they had to get that house there *somehow*."

"Who had to?"

"What do you take me for? If I knowed *who*, I'd find out *how*. Now, look, Chas. I'm no fool, but how do you figure it? You know as well as me how this 'dobe soil is when it's wet, and it rained all last week." He indicated the ploughed field behind Johnny's new house. "You couldn't cuss a dog through that field, let alone move a house, and there ain't a track. And these big poplars are in front." Hack gazed calculatingly at the tops of the high poplars. "Beats the hell out of me."

"It's a miracle," Tall stated.

"But in bad taste, if you ask me," Missy Bates spoke up. Missy Bates has a nose for gossip. "After all, Johnny's only got Lydia and the boy, and just who is he to put on airs with a house like that? Not that veterans aren't deserving, and Johnny got that medal, but materials are short enough without any one man being a hog about them. He could of got along perfectly well in the house he had."

"But it burned down," I stated.

"Certainly it burned down! How else would he have room on the lot for this place?"

"I'm a veteran myself and so is my husband," Mary Jacobs stated. "And we've been waiting months on materials for our house. And Johnny Smith finishes a big place like this overnight."

"No wonder he done it at night," Missy said. "Of all the crust!"

"I wonder," Hack Kitchen said. "They're pretty smart these days with those pre-fab jobs. Bring everything on a truck and you got a house in a couple of hours."

"Ever see a pre-fabricated brick and timber house?" Tall pointed out. "That place was built there last night."

"Some funny business going on around here," Hack stated darkly. "Guess I'll talk to Johnny again."

Hack went to the oak door and banged the bronze knocker, Tall and myself accompanying him. Johnny's boy opened the door, called, "Hey, Mom, it's the law!" and let us in. Lydia Smith came from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Johnny's under the house looking at pipes or something," she stated. "The more I think of this place the madder I get!"

"Charming, I'd say," Tall stated, looking about.

"Sure; you don't have to keep it up," Lydia stated. "Me working part time, I've got enough to do without taking care of a big place like this. Rent out the upstairs, and where's your privacy? What do they want to sneak in and put something like this up while we're asleep? It will cost a fortune to heat."

"Who did it?" I asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," Lydia stated. "We've got *some* rights, even if Johnny *did* get that medal. People always giving us houses without even so much as a by your leave. If it wasn't we had to have *someplace* to live, for two cents I'd refuse it!"

"We understand, Lydia," Hack stated soothingly. "Us, we're just here trying to get to the bottom of this and find out who done it to you."

"The elves done it," the child stated.

"Achaemenes, you go out in the back yard and play!" Lydia told the child. "I'm in no mood today for you and your elves! And don't get your feet muddy!"

"Achaemenes," Tall murmured, half to himself. "Interesting name . . ."

"It was Johnny's idea. Him and his books," Lydia stated.

"You can always call him Archie or something," Hack suggested brightly.

JOHNNY SMITH came in, a flashlight in one hand and covered from head to heels with mud. "It beats me," he stated. "I seen some funny things overseas, but this beats me."

"Johnny, you go out on the back porch and change those clothes," Lydia stated. "Act like you know how to live in a house."

"Still don't hardly believe it," Johnny stated, as he stripped off his muddy coveralls on the back porch. "Know what I got for floor joists? Oak!"

"That would cost a fortune," Hack said.

"Oak. And all the pipes underneath are brass. Solid brass. Even the drain pipes. Say, this house is *built*."

"Look here, Johnny, let's have it straight," Hack said. "You might get into trouble, a thing like this. I don't think it's legal. You'd better come clean."

"Don't get tough with me, Hack Kitchen," Johnny stated. "I was at the hotel all night and practically the whole town can prove it. People sympathizing with me about my house burning down until we hardly got any sleep. The whole thing beats the hell out of me."

At this juncture Tall came in from the back yard. I had not, personally, seen him slip out. "I thought that boy knew something," he stated. "Interesting coincidence, his name . . ."

"What boy?" Hack asked.

"Achaemenes. He knows all about it. He says . . ."

Hack dashed outside to talk with the boy. But while I am not personally versed in child psychology, it did seem to me that such remarks as, "O.K., kid, come clean and it will go easier with you;" "Don't try to dummy up, boy, we've got the goods on you;" "You want to get tough, I can get tough;" and similar expressions, effective though they may be with adult criminals, have small value in gaining the confidence of a five year old child. Hack turned to Tall. "O.K., what did he tell you?"

Tall smiled at the boy, and told him to go in the house and play. He had a way with children. "He told me it was the elves," Tall stated.

"Elves?" Hack said. "What elves?"

"Don't you know what an elf is? You must have read fairy tales when you were a boy."

"I must of read fairy tales! Look, Tall, I'm talking about who put that house there, and you tell me fairy tales!"

"Curious how fairy tales persist for centuries," Tall mused. "And every so often we smart and modern people find out a basis for scientific truth in one of them." He glanced upwards as a plane went overhead. "There's your magic carpet. Your seven-league boots are parked at the curb with a Ford nameplate. Who can look at a television set and laugh at the magic mirror of the Snow White story? Hack, do you remember the fairy tale of the elves who used to make shoes at night for the old cobbler?"

"Sure, that's in a book I got for my kid. But—"

"Ever stop to think just what a fairy tale was? It's a story of fairies, of imps and witches and elves and trolls. The existence of such creatures is the backbone of the entire body of ancient legend, and you stand there and argue about a few elves!"

"O.K., Tall. You show me them elves, and I'll believe in 'em, all right."

"You can never see the elves. Even I can't see the elves," Tall said wistfully. "There's hardly anybody, any more, except children, who believe in them. An elf is a very sensitive creature, Hack. Very shy. He won't disclose himself to anyone except a person with the simple faith of a child. And so few of us have that, these days. Years ago it was different. People in those days . . ."

"O.K., O.K., then it was the elves!" Hack stated impatiently. "Where does the boy come in at?"

"Curious, him being named Achaemenes. An old Greek name of Persian origin. It means 'having friends.' He's known the elves for a long time. He's alone quite a bit, his mother working part time and Johnny at school; they played with him. And then last night when he felt so bad about fooling with matches and burning the house down, they told him they'd build him a new house. I wouldn't be at all surprised if the elves are hard put to find anything to do, these days. So few believe in them . . ."

"For crying out loud!" Lydia cried, from the back porch. "The place is falling down already! Water's off and the lights went out!"

LEO ALLEN, the utility company serviceman, rose from beside the meter box on the back wall. "Just shut off your utilities, Lydia," he stated. "Sorry, but I got my orders."

"Orders?" Johnny said. "Our bill's paid!"

"Sure, but this here is a new house, and

it ain't legal to connect up a new house with utilities without an occupancy permit from the building inspector. I got my orders."

Just then Clem Shanks walked around the house. Clem, as the Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel may be aware, has the position of building inspector of our fair city in addition to running his cafe.

"You give me the O.K., Clem," Leo Allen stated, "and I'll connect her up."

"That's just what I'm here for," Clem stated. "Johnny, seeing as how you're a veteran and the town hero and all, I've been thinking it over instead of doing my duty according to law. But I make an exception with you, where does it leave me?"

"What's eating on you?" Johnny stated. "This house is built right. Not a better made house in town."

"That's beside the point, Johnny. Where's your building permit? I been back to the town hall checking the books to make sure. No building permit. No permit for electricity or plumbing. No inspections. Well, I'll tell you, Johnny, hero or no, if it ain't right you got to tear it out. What do you think we got a building code for, anyhow? The code says permits and inspections. Well, let's take a look at it, what we can see of it. But the way everything's covered up now, how do I know if it's according to code?"

Clem and Johnny crawled under the house. I remained with Tall and Hack peering through the opening in the foundation.

"I wonder," Tall mused, "if those elves know the plumbing code?"

Clem flashed his electric torch about under the house. He shook his head sadly. "Johnny, this won't do. Take that brass soil pipe . . ."

Just then Tall uttered a cry and dived under the house. He crawled rapidly through the mud and examined the pipe.

"I'll be doggoned," he stated, "if those elves didn't go and put in gold pipe."

"Gold?" Johnny said.

"Solid gold. But look at it another way, gold is the most enduring of metals, and it wouldn't cost an elf anything. Johnny," Tall stated, "that plumbing is there to stay!"

"The hell it is!" Clem stated. "It ain't code! Who ever heard of gold soil pipe? I don't believe it's gold anyhow. And whatever it is, it ain't cast iron. The code says cast iron soil pipe."

"What you kicking about?" Johnny said. "Gold is twice as good as cast iron for soil pipe."

"Johnny, there's a lot of things in the building code which don't make sense. But I didn't write it; don't argue with me. But I tell you what, Johnny. I done some figuring and there's a way out for you. If you done this whole job with your own hands, without any help, I can fix up the permits for you. There's your out."

"How could I build a house like this by myself in one night?"

"It took hundreds of elves, Achaemenes says," Tall stated.

"Elves?" Clem asked. "What union is that?"

"Elves are little people who go around at night doing good deeds."

"Oh, they are? Well, they better take out a license in this county or they're going to get their pants in a sling, is all I can say. I never heard of any licensed elves around here," Clem stated. "Johnny, the code says that unless the owner does it himself, he's got to have licensed men—builder, plumber, electrician. If you don't have licensed men, it don't matter how good it's made, she won't pass the code. That's only for the owner's own protection, Johnny."

"I don't see how it protects me," Johnny stated.

"Now, take these elves. They're no better than anybody else. If they want to go around putting up houses at night, they got to take out a license just like anybody else. I pass a house built like this, every contractor in this neck of the woods would land on me like a ton of brick. Johnny, I can't give you an occupancy permit."

"To hell with the permit."

"Sure, Johnny. But you can't live in a house without one. Can't get your utilities connected. And if you want to get tough about it," Clem stated, "we can condemn the place and tear it down."

THAT afternoon the town council, with myself presiding, held a special meeting to cope with the miracle. The modern world is not, unfortunately, geared to miracles, and the appearance of one pre-

sents many practical problems. The Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel will be pleased to learn, I am sure, that in the emergency the town council of Greene Corners set a splendid example of progressive thinking, aggressive action, and matchless cooperation and arbitration.

To begin with, the association of contractors flatly refused to give an inch. The labor unions threatened to strike. The building materials dealers were fit to be tied. However, we worked out a splendid compromise:

1. The elves would be required to take the regular examination for contractors' licenses. Examination blanks would be left that night in the council room of the city hall for the purpose.

2. All elves other than contractors or subcontractors would apply for membership in whatever union was required for the type of work performed. No elf would engage in any type of work on a building other than that allowed a member of his particular union. Elves would be paid double time for night work.

3. All materials not obtained miraculously would be taken from local supply houses and lumber yards, gold being left in payment.

4. Jobs requiring specialized skills beyond the scope of the elves would be left for licensed contractors and union labor.

5. The agreement was to be considered strictly an emergency measure, to apply to the erection of houses for veterans only, and would be terminated at the end of the housing crisis.

6. The elves would not be allowed any house under construction, undertake remodeling or repairs, borrow architectural plans without leaving gold in payment, or build for any veteran who already was adequately housed—*i.e.*, who owned or rented a minimum of seven-eighths of a room for each member of his family, not counting bathrooms as a room or children under four as a member of the family.

7. All miraculously obtained building materials left over from construction would be removed or destroyed, and in no event would be allowed to find a way into competitive channels. Excepting that one length of gold waste pipe, no less than four inches inside diameter nor shorter than five feet long, would be left beside each completed house, as payment to supply firms, architects, builders and workmen for profits and labor lost through the activity of the elves.

8. All elf work must meet the building code or better. Gold pipe, in this connection, would be considered equal to cast iron or galvanized steel.

9. Any omission or violation of any of the above requirements would automatically void the entire agreement. Excepting that the difficulties of liaison between Tall Harmon and the child, Achaemenes, and between the boy and the elves, would be taken under consideration in any point of issue; and that, in view of these difficulties, a ten day period of arbitration would follow any dispute, the town council of Green Corners to act as arbitration board.

10. And, lastly, a vote of thanks was tendered the elves for their splendid cooperation during the housing crisis.

Tall Harmon talked with Achaemenes and the boy talked to the elves. While the whole thing was possibly a bit involved for the child's innocent mind and no doubt complicated to the elves themselves, the elves did show a splendid spirit of cooperation. Next morning we found the application blanks left in the city hall all filled out properly, with an ingot of gold left for payment of fees, though I must say the handwriting of the elves was mighty curious, and some of the names on the applications astounding. And also, that very night the busy little elves built a fine new house for Orville Hoffman, a veteran who had been living with two children in a trailer. And each night thereafter for six nights they built a fine house for a needy veteran.

THERE were, of course, some practical difficulties. Veterans began moving out of rented places into tents, to be eligible for an elf-built house. A gang of thieves from the city, no doubt attracted by newspaper reports, were caught in the act of digging up Johnny Smith's sewer pipe; luckily the damage was not great. After three houses burned down from undetermined causes, we established a rule that eligibility applied only to veterans whose housing problem fitted the agreement as of the date of the agreement. We were forced to double our police force by employing an officer for night work. But problems arise with everything, and I am sure the Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel will agree that we kept the miracle situation under control. That is, until the Government stepped in.

We certainly cannot understand what business it is of the Government if we have a few local miracles. Admitted that the elves in their innocence have violated a few of the thousands of orders and directives issued by Government agencies as regards to house construction and ma-

terials therein—is that any reason for sixty FBI men to descend on Green Corners? The intentions of the elves are of the best.

And so just why have sixty FBI agents descended like locusts? Why are they demanding interviews with the elves? Why are they rushing about all night long in cars, upsetting the schedule so badly that the last three nights the poor elves were forced to build houses at (1) the bottom of Spring Gulch, (2) the center of the city park, and (3) atop the roof of the city hall itself, in a laudable attempt to keep busy without molestation? Just why, I ask, is the Government sticking its big nose in our business? You might call the work of the elves for the last three nights utterly wasted, except we can convert the house in the city park to some municipal use. The house in the gulch can't be used without great expense in blasting a road, and the one on the city hall—well, just when did the Government interfere, anyhow?

Personally, I am one hundred percent behind Tall Harmon in his refusal to negotiate with young Achaemenes. Though I cannot agree with Tall that the whole thing is somehow a tremendous joke. Nobody but Tall, apparently, can discuss elves with the boy, because in doing so one has to meet the child on his own grounds, and adults with this gift are rare. To avoid being annoyed by the FBI, Tall simply went on a toot. And when Tall goes on a toot, it's a good one.

This is a full statement of the facts of the case, in so far as I am aware of them. It is to be forwarded to the Honorable Zachery Z. Satchel with the request that he do his utmost, as our Congressman, to get the Government off our necks. After all, what has happened is nothing more nor less than a few simple miracles no more mystifying nor amazing than the contents of any fairy tale book. If the Government is going to investigate fairy tales, why can't it put the FBI on Jack and the Beanstalk and leave our elves alone?

GCAF7 —57 GREENCORNERS 27 1021A
HONORABLE ZACHERY Z SATCHEL
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
URGENTLY PLEAD YOU GET IMMEDIATE GOVERNMENT ACTION TO STOP PLAGUE OF MIRACLES. WHY DOES NOT GOVERNMENT DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS MENACE? WHAT DO WE PAY TAXES FOR? WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH THE FBI TO SEND A MERE SIXTY MEN ON A CASE LIKE THIS? WHERE IS THE SECRET SERVICE? WHY CAN'T PRESIDENT CALL OUT THE ARMY?

CHAS C GREENE

WHEREAS, there is a law of Nature that something cannot be made out of nothing, not even by an elf; and,

WHEREAS, it has been brought to our attention that the gold with which the elves made the pipe was obtained from the Treasury vaults at Ft. Knox, Kentucky; and,

WHEREAS, this is a highly illegal act despite the fact that to the elves the gold was superb material for pipes and had been doing nothing for years except rot in said vaults; and,

WHEREAS, it has been brought to our attention that the elves were not actually building new houses but merely removing unoccupied guest houses brick by brick from the big Daleborough estates and erecting them on new locations; and,

WHEREAS, said elves were committing further vandalism by transplanting shrubs, trees, flowers and sod from said estates; and,

WHEREAS, once started on their fiendish program, nothing seems to be able to stop said elves, because (1) Tall Harmon is still on a toot, (2) Achaemenes has recently been disillusioned about Santa Claus and in reaction is tending to throw the whole body of his childish faith overboard, and (3) it is even to be suspected that the elves were somewhat annoyed by our attempts to restrict and regulate their original good impulse, and are determined to keep on, come hell or high water or the entire U. S. Government; and,

WHEREAS, the transporation of stolen Government gold across state lines makes the whole affair a Federal matter; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Town Council of Greene Corners, place the entire matter into the lap of the Government where it belongs, and wash our hands of the whole affair.

PRAIRIE IN THE STARS

By Walter W. Stephen

Tonight there's a grave in a valley
Where my buddy was buried today,
And he's ridin' alone, to the star-drift hills
That they call the Milky Way.

Some night, by the light of the Pleiades,
Beyond barb-wire fences and bars,
I'll meet my old pal at Orion's corral
On the prairie of shimmering stars.

When the Owner of all of the ranches
Writes out the last check to my name,
I'll gallop out over the sunset
Where the white evening star is aflame.

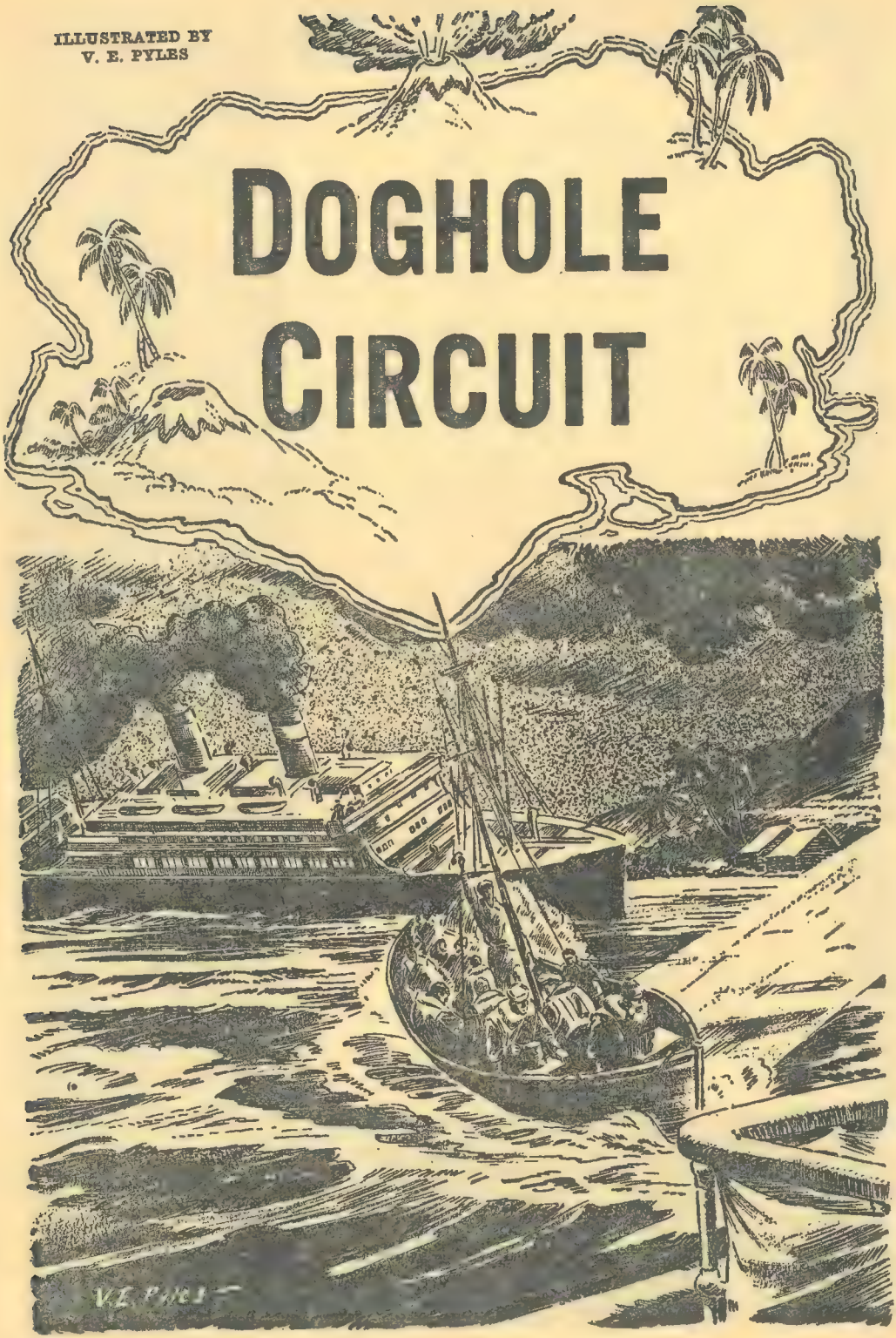
We will cut out the meteor dogies
Past Neptune, Uranus and Mars,
From the star-cluster hosts of the buffalo ghosts,
On the prairie of shimmering stars.

Where the trails through the universe echo
With the songs that the cowhands sing,
Where the space-fire flowers are blooming
And the weather is always spring—

We will ride open country forever
Beyond barb-wire fences and bars,
On an infinite range that no centuries change,
On the prairie of shimmering stars.

ILLUSTRATED BY
V. E. PYLES

DOGHOLE CIRCUIT



By STEVE HAIL

KEEPING to the welcome obscurity of the wharf sheds, Captain Gregory Garrett walked across the L-shaped length of the Hilo waterfront, governing his steps to a measured steadiness that was hardly in keeping with his hopeless mood of the moment.

To his left and ahead, framed by the square of sunlight that was the big loading door, lay the latest and undoubtedly last of his long list of commands. He halted just inside the door, his feet planted wide on the heat-warped pavement, straddling the hand luggage dropped at his feet. He let his hands hang loosely from his belt, while his blue eyes, faded by a decade of island summers, ranged along the scarred shell plating of the old freighter in a grim-lipped glance of appraisal.

His gaze came to rest at last on the rust-stained lettering on the counter, distorted now by the reflected light cast upward by the swell running long and deep through the cut in the breakwater. *Mauka, Honolulu,* he read, and the corners of his tight mouth twisted upward in a wry grin. It was a good name, a suitable name, for

"Got no room for you here!" Garrett bellowed. "I've got work to do."

a shipmaster nearing the end of his deep-water career. *Mauka.* In Hawaiian, toward the land—away from the sea.

The actual sight of the work-worn cargo vessel brought home sharply that which he had known to be fact since his transfer earlier this morning, yet which he hadn't fully admitted to his consciousness till now. This was the end of the line. The doghole circuit. It was "finished with engines" for Captain Gregory Garrett.

He'd been condemned to inter-island trade before this, he remembered bitterly, but then it had been only a step on the long climb upward to command. But now. . .

He sighed and picked up his bags, but even as he turned toward the gangway he paused involuntarily as the basso roar of a synchronized steam whistle blasted apart the mid-morning quietude of the sleepy harbor. That would be the *Island Queen,* Island Line's gleaming white flagship, departing for Honolulu. In spite of his resolve to put behind him that which was best forgotten, Garrett stepped back out of the shadow of the freighter's bulk and his eyes swept across the bay to where the passenger vessel was warping daintily away from an opposite pier. For a passing moment the harbored bitterness filmed his eyes in a darkening cloud. Then his shoulders lifted in the practiced shrug of indifference that had become a part of his defiance of the past. He swung around once more toward the *Mauka's* plank, but his shoulders sagged this time under the burdening weight of the luggage.

HE LEFT his gear outside the door to the master's cabin and climbed wearily up the inclined ladder to the bridge. A youth, tall, sparse-framed, was leaning his elbowed weight on the pipe railing, watching the *Queen's* undocking maneuvers with the critical interest of an embryo shipmaster.

"Captain Gregory Garrett," Garrett introduced himself quietly. "I'm to take over here. You're the mate?"

The other snapped erect embarrassedly, making a gesture toward the cap that clung miraculously to the back of his neck. "Yes, sir. Name's John Matthews. I heard we were to get a new skipper, but I . . . Garrett, sir?"

The captain saw that even this youngster knew. He nodded. He might as well get it over. "Relegated to the doghole circuit, Mr. Matthews," he said. "Banishment, I guess you'd call it." His laugh was not as light as he would have liked it.

"But you—you had the *Queen* for a while, sir. You . . ." The boy's eyes turned quickly away, his neck coloring below the line of his jaw as recognition prodded his memory.

Garrett saw then that the mate hadn't known, as he'd thought at first. That's how sensitive you got once you were branded for losing your nerve. Well, it didn't matter. Someone on the *Mauka* would remember soon enough. It was just as well it had come up now, at the beginning.

He nodded again. "Yes," he said. "Till I knocked a dozen pilings out of the Honolulu wharf." He waited for the chattering steam winch at number two hold to ease its interrupting clamor. "The last of a series of accidents, Mr. Matthews. When you've beached a ship at one time or another it seems you get to remembering. Remembering at the wrong moments sometimes, just when you need all your faculties for the job at hand." He grimaced. "Land-shy, I believe, is the polite term. Some people have a more unpleasant name for it."

"I—I remember, sir," Matthews blurted. "After you lost the *Mahalo,* you—you. . ."

The name cut like the unexpected slash of arctic spray. That disaster, remembered down the years by Island Line crews, yet never mentioned in Garrett's presence, sent the veil of shadow again across his eyes. "The *Mahalo,* Mr. Matthews," Garrett agreed softly. "You're not much good after something like that. At least, it seems, I haven't been." He felt his voice faltering and he fumbled a blackened pipe out of his pocket and turned away, pointedly ending the conversation.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," John Matthews stammered, and reached a foot for the bridge ladder, mumbling something about the loading at number two.

Garrett watched him go, his eyes following the eager energy of the other with pensive eyes, remembering his own ambitions of ten years ago. And now this. Inter-island trade. The proving ground for youth, and the interment place for

failures. In and out of holes in the cliffs with a dozen packages of freight, sometimes making two and three plantation hamlets in a day. If you were lucky you got an overnight stopover for a thousand tons of sugar—and respite from the ever-present fear of how your next landing would shape up; and how far off the hidden rocks you'd be when your anchors finally held. Those were the things that brought on the sleepless nights.

He shrugged, and touched a match to his pipe and watched the blue haze spiral upward to join the smoke pluming over the lip of volcanic Kilauea in the inshore distance.

MATTHEWS clattered up the bridge ladder from the boat deck.

"Been aft to check on the deck gang, too, sir. New bunch, most of them, fresh out of training school. We'll never have a happy ship, I'm afraid, till I can convince 'em boat falls have nothing to do with a Niagara excursion." His mouth was a rueful smile.

Garrett's mouth mirrored the mate's grin, thankful for the obvious forgetfulness of their first moments, but his mind repeated the other's words. It would take more than a seasoned crew to make a happy ship. A skipper, for instance, whose veins didn't run with water.

He puffed silently, putting the unpleasantness away from him, and leaned on the canvas dodger, watching the *Island Queen* round the breakwater in a sweeping curve. Surprisingly, she turned sharply south instead of shaping on her usual northward heading for Oahu.

Garrett turned an inquiring eye to the mate, grateful for the opportunity of small talk.

"She's going Kona side," Matthews explained. "The other side of the island. Last minute change. The resort hotel over there opened for the season last week."

"The *Queen's* going to Kailua?" Garrett asked, and small wonder edged his voice. "With her six hundred feet of water line and drawing five fathoms? There's hardly room enough for the *Mauka* to swing in that hole, let alone the *Queen.*"

The mate angled his jaw toward the smoke feathering majestically westward before the Trades from off the crown of Kilauea. "Passenger agent is afraid the tourists'll get grimed up from ash," he explained, "if they tote 'em across by car like they advertise in the cruise literature. The crater's been burping regular for a week. They figure on ferrying them ashore by launch, I hear, while the *Queen* stands offshore till morning."

A month ago Garrett would have been concerned with the hare-brained whims of passenger agents. Now, his expression became a mental shrug.

"Hey, what's this?" John Matthews cried, and leaned over the weather dodger to investigate the sudden unseemly quiet of the stevedores working number two hatch. The gang, to a man, was lining the offshore rail staring intently toward the smoldering Kilauea.

"You there!" Matthews yelled. "It ain't noon. You got another twenty slingloads there on the dock. We . . ."

His voice dropped off to silence as over and around them the bright morning sun went out like the abrupt lowering of premature night. To the north and west a billowing pyre of smoke and cinders belched from the mountain top and spread lazily into the azured Hawaiian sky.

The stevedores broke, chattering, for number two. Strongbacks and hatchcovers began banging into place as the gang covered up. The boss longshoreman turned a complacent face to the bridge, his spread hands aiding his explanation. "Kilauea pop off, we go home. Long time custom. Come back tomorrow maybe."

"But—" Matthews spluttered wrathfully, "but you can't—"

The last hatchcover dropped into place with emphasized finality. The Kanakas pocketed their cargo hooks and filed toward the plank. They could.

Garrett raised tempering eyes from the opened envelope of orders. "Break out all hands, Mr. Matthews," he sighed philosophically. "This could go on for a week. We've got cargo for the southern end of the island. The *Mauka's* a freight ship. We'll get under way at once."

THE moorings at Honuapo weren't difficult, anchored as they were a half mile off the beach. This day, too, there was a shore launch to help run their lines. But Captain Gregory Garrett was a full

two hours tying up. When finally he rang the engines off there was pallor under his leathered tan and it was long minutes before his hand steadied enough to touch off the pipe held tight in his rigid jaws.

They were to lay overnight, the agent sent out word, and begin loading sugar in the morning. Thankfulness and relief swept over Garrett like surcease from doom. He sank, sweating and exhausted, into a chair in his room and stared at the blank bulkhead, and wondered if these landings could ever again become anything other than little deaths.

He was still sitting there an hour later when the message came aboard. A barefooted plantation hand knocked diffidently at the door, a white envelope from the agent in his grimy hand. Matthews, sensing trouble, was at his elbow.

The message, relayed from the Honolulu office and telephoned down from Hilo, was datelined an hour earlier and addressed to the master of the *Mauka*.

Garrett read: *"Island Queen* aground in zero visibility off Kailua Point. Passengers marooned ashore and panicky fearing second eruption. Rescue impossible by car due lava spill. Order you as nearest vessel to evacuate passengers by launch. Tugs proceeding from Honolulu to effect refloating *Island Queen."*

Matthews eyes were wide. "Gosh," he said, "smoke must be thick Kailua way." He added after a moment's thought, "But Lord, sir, with twin screws, fathometer, gyro and twenty thousand horses! Maybe they need a crystal ball?"

Garrett savored the note's edge thoughtfully with his teeth. "Captain Wilkins of the *Queen* is no fool," he said. "And smoke's no thicker than fog. It's these Kona currents. Tricky." He rose to his feet, steady now after the first panicky impact of the message. This, after all, was routine. This, he could do. There would be no landing necessary here. Not even close approach to the harbor. Proceed to Kailua. Stand well offshore while launches brought out the passengers, then put back to Hilo or Honolulu, whichever the office wanted. He smiled. "Ring Stand By, Mr. Matthews," he ordered.

It didn't look so simple though, by the time they had rounded South Cape and poked the *Mauka's* blunt snout northward along the leeward coast of the Big Island. The overcast of smoke lowered steadily, until by sundown they were ploughing blindly through murk as thick as channel fog. Garrett got a last definite bearing on South Cape Light, looming like a ghostly finger out of the raining ash. He should follow close along the coast to be sure of finding the harbor, but the old fear came back, stronger than reason.

"Left," he said, "we'll hold well offshore."

"But . . ." John Matthews started in. Then he got the look in Garrett's eyes and let the sentence drop.

The rugged coastline to starboard fell away to blankness, their last link with the island. Garrett had the patent log streamed astern, then settled down to a dead reckoning run with senses alerted to every remembered trick of island pilotage.

He posted lookouts on bridge wing and foc'slehead, then retired to the chartroom, leaving Matthews at the wheelhouse windows to listen for the remote possibility of breakers inshore. It was there at the chart desk, pouring over charts and tide tables, that the overall picture spread before his mind like the seascape from the peak of Haleakala.

On this steep-to coastline with water into the very beach, there could be only one place where the *Queen* could ground. It had to be the coral reef a quarter mile off the land and south of the harbor entrance. It was the shoal that showed on the chart, with its antiquated survey, as having a sounded depth of thirty feet. But charts on this seldom visited coast were to be used as a caution, Garrett knew from experience, not as infallible aids to navigation. There was water inside the reef, but too deep to make for good holding ground unless the *Queen* could plant her anchors on the beach. Maybe, though, she could kedge herself offshore.

His thumbnail underscored an entry in the tide tables, not that it meant much in these latitudes, with only a two foot rise at best, but . . .

He straightened then, his brows drawing together in a frown of wonder at his own concern. This was a problem for the tugs, and the master of the *Island Queen*—and the swivel-chaired fool in Honolulu who had ordered her here. He, Gregory Garrett, had his own orders. Stand off-

shore and evacuate the passengers. As simple as that. He tossed the tide book aside. It fell unnoticed to the deck beside the wheelhouse door. He went out into the pilothouse, putting aside his worry for the other vessel.

THERE were few words spoken on the blind run up the coast. The *Mauka's* sturdy heart pounded madly, shaking the encrusted rivets in her thin-skinned hull, vibrating the deck plates, but never faltering. Garrett walked the inshore wing, tense, listening for the improbable crash of breakers on the lava lined shore. Once a sound drifted down the scant wind, a sound that was probably the rush of porpoise alongside, but could conceivably be the sigh of surf on a sandy beach. Garrett stopped his pacing, his knuckles shining where he gripped the rail. "We'll come left another five degrees, Mr. Matthews," he said.

The mate looked at him curiously, poorly disguised pity shading his glance, but he kept his silence. "Left five," he ordered the helmsman.

Finally, only minutes before midnight, Garrett took a last reading from the log and figured concentratedly on the back of an envelope. He coughed uncertainly in the deadened, sulphurous air of the mountain's lee and raised his head to the mate.

"Ought to be within a mile or so," he said gruffly. "Half speed, sir. And have that lookout for'ard take his fingers out of his ears."

Ten minutes later, a mournful hoot, muffled by blanketing cinders, seeped across the oppressive night. Captain Gregory Garrett allowed himself a thin sigh of thankfulness as he pushed his cap backward and wiped sweat from where the band had been.

"That's the *Queen,*" he said, and coughed again to hide his relief. "Blowing to guide us in. Wilkins knows we'd never sight the entrance. Ring her down to Stop, Mr. Matthews."

They picked the flagship up a moment later as they coasted in, a point to starboard, several hundred yards away. She was ablaze with lights that barely penetrated the surrounding murk, but that served to illumine her stained white sides, soiled now with ash and the fuel oil pumped overside to break the force of the swells sucking past her counter. She was down by the head, listing a bit to port, pounding gently in the small sea. In the glare of the cross-trees clusters, Garrett could make out the crew working the cargo gear, transferring everything movable toward the stern.

Even as he watched, the *Queen* came to struggling life. Her screws thrashed viciously, pushing foam along her trembling flanks as the engines backed down full. Offshore, Garrett could make out a wire anchored to a stern kedge, singing with strain as seamen on the mooring deck heaved with the warping winch. The liner fought savagely for freedom from the clutching coral. Her efforts were futile. The propellers braked to a stop finally, the cream of their efforts dying into blackness. The *Queen* was still an unyielding part of the rocks that claimed her.

Captain Garrett, watching, shook his head. He voiced his thoughts half aloud. "She'll never come off astern," he said, "without half a dozen tugs." His practiced eye ran along the giant's sheer. She was down by the bows all right. He pictured the open water ahead of her. Enough to maneuver in with a twin screw vessel, given careful handling. Too bad she couldn't get off that way.

He shrugged and picked up a megaphone and aimed it at the bridge of the liner, abeam now and a bare hundred yards distant.

"The *Queen!* Can we be of assistance?" He shouted the question, bowing to the courtesies of the sea, but secure in his knowledge of the orders that bade him stand offshore for the passengers.

A white-clad figure, with shoulders sagging under the weight of defeat, turned toward the woebegone freighter. Wilkins. The captain of the *Island Queen* looked down at the diminutive *Mauka.* His voice came booming back from a portable electric megaphone.

"Afraid it's no use, Captain. Tugs will be here by dawn. I got a copy of your message. I'll signal in to start ferrying the passengers out to you."

Relief lighted Garrett's eyes. He raised a hand in understanding and compliance, and turned toward the telegraph to ring Slow Astern. It was then that his eyes fell

on the forgotten tide book on the deck where he had tossed it carelessly a few hours back. He remembered the nail-scored figures on the dated page. High water was at two A.M., little more than an hour hence. A one point eight foot rise. Not much, but enough maybe with the help of the tugs. His hand, outstretched to the telegraph, fell to his side. The tugs, he remembered, couldn't possibly be here before daylight. And daylight would bring the wind, building up the morning seas that would make the rescue efforts futile. He wondered if the office had thought of that.

"We're drifting down, sir," Matthews interrupted from the wing. "Shall I give her a kick astern?"

"Wait," said Captain Garrett, and thought about the honest water ahead of the *Queen,* but inshore and close to the land. He thought, too, about another day when his own ship, the *Mahalo,* had gasped out her life on a similar ledge. He'd looked again at the despairing figure on the other bridge, and saw himself. The bow of the shoulders, the drooping head . . .

HE SIGHED, and turned his back on the mate, not wanting young Matthews to see the dread that must be reflected in his eyes.

"Get Sparks to radio Honolulu," he growled then, "for permission to aid the *Queen.* She's got to come off tonight."

"But—but, Lord, sir. The passengers. Your orders. They—they'll have your license for this."

"My license, Mr. Matthews, wouldn't mean much to me if I left a good ship breaking up when I could help. Get Honolulu for me if you please."

The mate swallowed audibly, but he was a good officer. He started, running, for the radio shack.

A native launch, little more than a powered scow, appeared out of the inshore darkness. A score of bedraggled and disheartened tourists crowded its thwarts. It came on, straight for the *Mauka.*

Captain Garrett leaped for the bridge wing, waving it away and toward the *Island Queen.* "Got no room for you here!" he bellowed. "I've got work to do. You'd only be in the way."

In the eerie glow of smoke-dimmed lamps from the *Queen,* a spokesman for the passengers stood up. He mopped at his dirty face with a dirtier handkerchief. "They—they promised us you'd take us off, Captain. You can't send us away. The *Queen* may—may be breaking up by morning."

"We may be breaking up in half any hour," Garrett answered grimly. "Get to the *Queen,* I tell you. Captain Wilkins will take care of you. I'd have to stow you in the hold like sugar sacks on here."

This foreboding picture decided the launch's spokesman. He motioned the small boat operator toward the *Queen's* accommodation ladder hanging overside.

Matthews shadowed the door to the wheelhouse. "Nothing from Honolulu, sir," he relayed from the radio operator. "Only a dispatcher on duty there, and he won't take responsibility for change of orders. All the officials are on the way down here on the tugs."

"Good," Garrett said, "at least we won't have a lot of rocking chair skippers telling us what to do. Get for'ard, Mister, and get the devil-claws off the anchors. Both of 'em."

He caught up the megaphone again. "Captain!" he yelled up at Wilkins. "There's water ahead of you. If you can lighten her aft and plant your anchors on the beach to heave with, then come ahead on a full bell, I think she'll come off. It'll be high water in an hour."

The uniformed figure on the liner's bridge stiffened at this effrontery. "I'm aware of that, Captain," he said coldly. "Unfortunately these scows here haven't buoyancy enough to handle my ground tackle. And if they could, there's not a man with guts enough to carry 'em in."

Captain Gregory Garrett took a deep breath. "That's what I'm getting at, Captain. Give me your insurance cable over the bow and slack it off to me as I go in. I'll hook my anchors on the beach and back down enough to hold on. You can heave ahead on the *Mauka.* Use us for your anchorage."

The austere figure on the *Queen's* bridge wing was silent. Garrett could imagine his furrowed brows.

At last Wilkins stirred and he voiced the question Garrett had been steadfastly pushing from his mind for minutes past.

"How will you get off, Captain, when we come free—with both your anchors planted ashore? There's not room enough in there for both of us to risk maneuvering. I'd play hell trying to tow you off."

Garrett had his answer ready. He hoped his voice expressed confidence. "I'll unshackle in the locker," he answered. "We'll let the chains go and back clear."

Garrett could sense Wilkins' shrug in the shadow of the bridge wing. "It's your vessel," the master of the *Island Queen* said at last, "if you want to take a chance. But a single screw ship like yours is bound to back to port—toward the reef. And you haven't sea room to swing ahead. You won't get off, I'm afraid."

I'm afraid, too, Garrett thought. He weighed the long chance he was counting on. But thinking about it didn't help. He shoved the telegraph ahead to Slow. "Have a heaving line ready as I come in," he called.

He rounded the stern of the *Island Queen* and jockeyed the *Mauka's* fantail almost under the towering stem of the other vessel. A monkey fist thudded against the house and in a moment the liner's towing wire followed the heaving line aboard in a ponderous bight. Seamen made it fast; once around the deckhouse aft for extra precaution, then hung off on the mooring bitts with a rope stopper, easily slipped. Captain Garrett moved ahead on Dead Slow, watching for the surf, heard but still unseen in the gloom ahead.

THE pounding of the nearing breakers was like the blood hammering in his temples as he thought about the coming minutes. He was a complete fool, he told himself bitterly, to chance his ship and his livelihood on a gamble like this. After all, the *Mauka* was as important to him as the *Queen* was to Wilkins. And . . . But was it? Wilkins still had his nerve, and would keep it as long as he had the *Queen* with water under her. On the other hand, he and the *Mauka* were at the end of the road, has-beens running the doghole circuit. They would be small losses compared to Wilkins and the *Queen*. Maybe it was as well this way. Anyhow, he'd made his choice, and—hell, he'd see it through.

"Breakers ahead!" came a frightened yell from Matthews on the focs'lehead. "Shall I let go?"

"Hang on," Garrett said, and his hand poised to stop the engine came away from the telegraph. He wiped his sweating palms on his trouser leg, steeling himself to wait. It was then he felt the *Mauka* scrape, stagger, and recover as her forefoot found bottom and slid to one side. He cuffed the telegraph astern to Full. It was time.

"Let go the port anchor!" he yelled at Matthews, and then before the chain, cascading out the hawsepipe, was slowed, he dropped his other hand. The starboard hook, fire sparking from the wildcat, fell with a splash, its spouting foam mingling with the breaker's froth as the *Mauka* backed down.

The chains fetched short and held. Matthews raised two clenched fists toward the bridge, and Garrett's hand ready on the blinker key signaled accomplishment to the *Queen*.

Within minutes, with the *Mauka's* bowers bedded deep and the chain pawled down, the *Queen* was ready for her bid. High on her towering focs'lehead her crew went into action and the towing cable came spooling in over the gypsyhead in anguished spurts of effort. Finally, with her windlass nearly jumping off the bed plates under the strain, Wilkins gunned his engines.

A cry went up from the breathless crew as sudden slack came in on the cable. She was moving ahead, groaning under the tortured grating of steel on rock, inch by hard-won inch, but ahead.

On the little freighter's trembling bridge deck, Gregory Garrett remembered to breathe again. "She's coming off," he said to the mate, "if the *Mauka* doesn't break in two!"

Matthews felt the pulse of the vibrating deck plates with his booted foot. "I've been with her more than a year, sir," he grinned. "She can take worse than this."

"I hope," said Captain Garrett, and asked, "Is your chain ready to slip, Mister?"

"Yes, sir, whenever—"

A triumphant shout arose from the other vessel. The *Queen* was free. She came floating toward them on an even keel, looming huge in the semi-darkness,

the wire hanging slack between the two ships. Steam torn from her stack bellowed thanks, tempered by warning of the slackened wire tailing overside.

Garrett stopped the *Mauka's* laboring turbine.

"Get aft, Mister," he barked at Matthews, "and cut that cable adrift. Let me know when it's clear of the wheel. The men for'ard can slip the chains when you sing out. Lively now!"

Words from Matthews were needless to advise Garrett of the wire's release. It dropped with a splash astern, sinking like the heavy steel it was to the bottom. Garrett made a cutting gesture with his hands to the waiting men on the focs'lehead and the anchor cables ran out their bitter ends with deep rumbles of escape.

With their own engine going full astern, Garrett watched the *Queen* turn short around on opposing screws and circle widely toward the open water clear of the reef. Wilkins, dim in the shadows of the overhanging bridge, waved an encouraging hand. His voice came echoing across the widening distance, amplified by the bull horn.

"My thanks, Captain!" He hesitated. "I holed my double bottoms coming off, I'm afraid. I'll have to run for Honolulu. Anything I can do?"

The *Mauka* had no amplifier, but Garrett, seeing the regained erectness of the *Queen's* captain, said, "No thanks, Captain. I'll just call it square for the *Mahalo*. And the aid was mutual. You've helped more than you know." He waved the *Queen* on its way.

His voice was lost in the rising scream of the turbine from below as the *Mauka* gathered sternway.

HIS eyes left the *Queen* then, and concentrated on the converging course they were making with the shoal. They were backing straight for the inward curving horn of the coral now, their wake like a ruled line. Then as he watched, fingernails biting into his palms, the freighter began to swing slowly, inexorably toward the center of the shoal, backing to port as Wilkins had predicted.

Matthews, returned from the fantail, cursed and lurched toward the telegraph. Garrett's hand closed on his arm.

"No, Mister," he said. "We'll keep her like she goes. She's got to swing to starboard. Got to, I say. She . . ."

In seeming answer to his fervent hope, the freighter eased her swing, straightened, swung slowly, hesitantly, then faster in a broad circle to starboard. The angry water of the shoal boiled past on the port hand, close—but clear. Then, like something human, the *Mauka* slewed again in the opposite direction, bearing hard to port. The reef lay that way, but inshore now, its danger past.

Captain Gregory Garrett wiped a sleeve across the lines of strain grooving his forehead, but strangely his hand was steady.

"You can come ahead on your engines any time now, Mr. Matthews," he said coolly, and smiled. "We'll shape our course for Honuapo. We've sugar to come aboard."

John Matthews rubbed at a puzzled frown as he pushed the telegraph ahead. "But—but I don't understand, sir, why we should back to starboard the way we did. Any single screw ship, with a right-handed propeller will—"

"Current, Mr. Matthews," Garrett explained, searching for his pipe. "Tricky down this way. There's a back eddy sets south along the beach inside the shoal. Our stern, deeper than the bow, backed into it and swung to starboard till we reached the charted current offshore. That's what set the *Queen* on the beach in the first place." He struck a match and puffed at the sulphur-impregnated tobacco enjoyably. "You learn those things on the doghole circuit. Good experience for a man on the way up, Mister." He added to himself, ". . . or the way back."

He thought again of the *Mahalo*, but now it was only a name belonging to the dead past. This time, too, there was no cloud darkening his eyes. Instead there was a faint sparkle of amusement, recalling the mate's wistfulness of the day before. "I think we're on the way to having a happy ship here, Mr. Matthews," he said banteringly.

The mate grinned suddenly in understanding. "Yes, sir," he answered cheerfully. Then his smile dimmed for a moment. "If I can ever teach those mother's darlings in the deck gang," he gloomed, "that there's a difference between a gin block and a rickey."

WHERE ACTION PAYS OFF! By Mullin.

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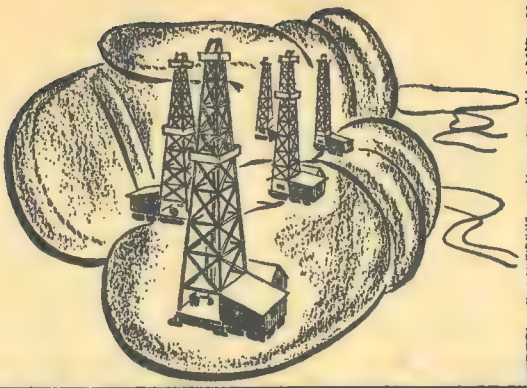


THE CRAZY KIND

By

CLIFTON ADAMS

ILLUSTRATED BY
JULIAN O. CHAMBERS

THE first thing you noticed about this guy was his grin. You could tell right off he was the kind that would stand flat-footed and look the world in the eye—and if he didn't like it he would spit in it.

The first I see of him, me and Ed Burk was on the mane-and-tail crew cutting weeds back of number-two derrick. I looked up and there he was, cutting and grinning. His khakis was clean, which ain't the usual case with roustabouts, so I figured the farm boss had just put him on.

He's a big geezer, one eighty-five, ninety, but the way he's put together you don't notice it right off. I guessed he was about

"I said get that wrench," Hack snarled. "Get it!"

twenty-four, five. He had hair black as a driller's glove slicked down close to his skull, and a pushed-in nose that looked like maybe somebody had lopped him across the mush with a ball bat.

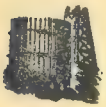
Nothing about the guy struck me as being so queer, but the way Ed Burk was giving him a going over you'd think he had two heads or something. Finally Ed just quits cutting weeds, and looks.

"I seen you some place," Ed accuses him.

This guy grins in the middle of a swing. "It would have to be in Chicago," he said. "I been there more than twenty years."

Ed shook his head in a way that practically accused the guy of lying. "That wasn't it." Then he picked up his weed cutter and got to swinging. "But I'll think of where it was sooner or later."

Sometimes I think Ed Burk has got a kink in his crown block. He's always got a angle. He's the kind that would bet you even money that the sun won't come up tomorrow morning, figuring the law of averages is on his side. He is also the kind that will draw two cards to inside straights. That is one reason he is a roustabout at the age of fifty instead of being a millionaire like he should of been.



ME AND this new guy got to talking and it comes out that his name is Duke Hastings, and it winds up he's screwy as a bolt factory. When he let it drop just why he come to Oklahoma in the first place, I decided for sure he was fit to put away in a quilted hotel. First off, he says his business in Chicago turned out to be a dry hole.

"So," he goes on, "I figured it was time to look around and see where a guy could make a dollar or so." Mind you, all the time he was talking he had that grin on his pan, and I could of swore he meant every word of it. "So I checked up on where the most money could be made in the least time and found out it was in oil. I hear Oklahoma was full of oil so I hightailed it for Oklahoma."

"So," I said, my tongue in my cheek so you'd thought I had the mumps, "you aim to get yourself a little field and make yourself a million or so."

"Why not?" the guy wanted to know. "It's been done before." The only kind of people that talks like that is the crazy kind. You can't do a thing with them.

It wound up that he didn't know a drill-bit from a crown-block. The only oil he ever seen before was what he put on his hair. But we kept up the gab until the noon tour came on, then me, the Duke, and Ed went over by the rig to wait for the crew truck. That's when Ed let out a growl like a dog over a bone. I knew Hack Lawson was somewhere around.

Lawson come up from behind us, dark and mean-looking as an Oklahoma cyclone, and almost as big. He hefted himself to the derrick floor and Ed let out another growl. Just the sight of Hack Lawson, and Ed Burk is fit to bite himself a piece of drill stem. And I can't say I blame him.

If it hadn't been for Lawson, Ed would own a field instead of working on one. Lawson was the driller that drilled Ed's wildcat acreage three years back when the field was just opening. He sunk a hole as dry as a Kansas summer. The windup is that in less than two years that ground had over a dozen producing wells on it—after Ed had sold it. Some people claim Lawson's bank account jumped to five figures about the same time. But that's not all. Ed's got his last piece of acreage plastered to the hilt, and it comes out that nobody but Hack Lawson is holding the plasters. So you can't really blame Ed for growling.

Ed stomped off talking to himself, leaving me and the Duke sitting there watching the drilling crew. Hack Lawson was hollering and bossing people around. Hack was the boss on that rig, and he don't let nobody forget it. He had a big chain wrench in one hand, and was leaning over the guard rail reaching for the water hose with the other. I guess he must of hit a slick spot there on the floor, anyway he slipped and dropped the wrench to the ground. Hack roars at the Duke, him being the closest.

"You!" he bellows like a bull hung on barbed-wire. "Get that wrench!"

The Duke looked at the wrench, then up at Lawson. Then, as cool as a dollar hot-plate, "Get it yourself."

You'd of thought the boiler blew up. Before I could budge, Lawson was off that derrick floor and snatched the Duke's shirt front in one big paw. Hack's face was red, and his little piggish eyes was narrowed down to slits. Compared to Hack Lawson, the Duke looked like the "before" picture in a vitamin advertisement.

"I said get that wrench," Hack snarled. "Get it!"

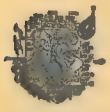
The Duke said, "Get your hands off me, you big slob, before I knock your head off."

A lot of people have called Hack names, but not to his face. Lawson's knee jumped up like a Kraut land mine and exploded in the Duke's groin. The Duke's face turned green, his mouth worked like a fish on land, gasping for air. Crazy, Lawson jerked the Duke, spun him half around by his shirt, and slashed him across the kidneys with a knotted club of a fist. The Duke smacked the ground with his face. He doubled and Hack slammed a big brogan in his ribs for good measure.

Hack Lawson is the kind that would walk a mile to get behind a guy so he could stab him in the back.

The Duke's face was still green. I could of swore he was out cold, but so help me, he was getting up off the ground. Hack was ready to let the brogan fly again when the farm boss rushed up and stopped it.

We got the Duke in the back of the crew truck fast as we could and headed for town. He don't do much talking until me and Ed get him off the truck and into the Ritz beer hall. The Duke was walking a little one-sided and Ed was trying to help him. I could see that the Duke's stock had took a big jump with Ed. We moved into one of the booths in the back of the place and I ordered a round of suds.



THE DUKE looked at us and that grin comes back on his mush, though I don't see nothing funny. "Thanks," he said sort of weak, pulling his beak out of the beer. "I usually put on a better show."

All this time Ed was giving him the eye. Then, click. You could fairly see the light turn on and the cogs start to grind inside Ed's noggin. His eyes lit up and he slapped the table, sloshing suds in my lap.

"I knowed I'd remember where I seen you," says Ed, proud as a pipe-liner with a two-bit cigar. "You're from Chicago."

That was a shrewd piece of thinking, since the Duke hadn't mentioned over a dozen times that he was from Chicago.

"You're a fighter," Ed adds. You could of fooled me—especially after seeing that caper with Hack Lawson.

The Duke's grin slipped pretty bad, like he had a bad taste in his mouth. "I *was* a fighter," he corrected. I figured he was thinking about Hack Lawson. I ordered another round of suds and the Duke opened up. It turns out that Ed had seen his picture on the sports page. Ed watches the sports page like roughnecks would a burlesque. In fact, Ed don't miss anything that there's a chance to lose money on.

The Duke goes on to fill in the part he left out when he was talking before. He was a fighter all right, and from what he said, a pretty good one. But for some reason or other he quit the game.

While the Duke was talking I could still see the wheels go round in Ed's head. That's bad. When Ed starts thinking, it's a good bet that he's fixing to lose some more money. But he couldn't lose much, I figured, because he didn't have much. So I was all set for some screwy idea out of Ed.

He didn't spring it all at once. He decided to be foxy. "How," he said to the Duke real casual like, "do you aim to make money in the oil business?"

"Well," the Duke admitted, "I don't know exactly. Something will show up." I never seen such trusting souls. I shuddered to think what would happen if Ed was cooking up a partnership of some kind. I no sooner thought it than Ed comes right out and says it.

"How," Ed whispers like he was selling French post cards, "would you like to have half royalty in a piece of acreage that's going to start a new field around here?" Before the Duke could say anything, Ed was handing him a long spiel about that chunk of land and how Hack Lawson bought up the plasters on it.

"This," Ed goes on, "is what I got in mind. First off, the American Legion boys is puttin' on some fights the middle of the month, and sure as there's a well in Oklahoma, Hack Lawson'll be the first to get in 'em. I never knowed him to pass up a chance yet to push somebody around. That's where you come in." Ed was leaning across the table now. To see him, you'd of thought he was hatching a revolution. "Hack's a boy that likes to bet on hisself. When he finds out it's you he's fightin'," Ed winds up, "he'll give at least five to one on hisself. We collect twenty thousand when you win, pay off the plasters, and start drillin' fifty-fifty."

Just like that. Easy as falling off a derrick. But that pipe dream of Ed's was as full of holes as a Texas field after a big boom. First off, Ed couldn't raise four thousand dollars with a hoist. Next, from what I seen of the Duke, he had about as much chance of winning as a lame rabbit on a dog track. Even the Duke couldn't take a scheme like that in one bite.

"Maybe you didn't see that little ruckus me and Hack Lawson had this morning," the Duke said.

"I seen it," Ed says. "You got the knee. That's Hack's favorite pastime, givin' people the knee. In the ring you could beat him."

The Duke was turning the thing over in his mind. "Maybe—" He mumbles more to himself than to Ed. "I'd have to work fast. If it went over three rounds—" He does some more thinking. His face was serious now, his forehead wrinkled until you could screw a nut on it. He didn't look near so dumb when he wasn't grinning. I could see he was going over all the angles. Finally he said, "That land. How do you know there's oil on it?" Right then I began to figure maybe he wasn't so crazy after all.

"One thing," says Ed, "Hack Lawson's been tryin' to get it for a year."

Seemed like that settled it. The grin came back and the Duke stared for a while through the back of the booth. "I don't like a knee in my groin," he said. "It makes me feel bad." He looked back at Ed and drained his mug. "Another thing. Say everything goes right, how are we raising the four thousand?"

"I'll raise it," Ed says. "You just win the fight."

I WAS groggy for a week. Ed had pulled some crazy stunts in his time but this one took the gold-plated drill-bit.

But he had Hack Lawson pegged right. His was the first name on the card. And you should of heard him howl when he found out he was matched against the Duke. He complained that he figured to pick up some change on the fight, but if he didn't have no competition he couldn't get no bets.

He started offering three to one but nobody would listen to him. He upped it to four and spent all his time in the beer hall low-rating himself, telling the boys how he strained his back on the rig and couldn't hardly get around. Still no takers. Finally one night me, Ed, and the Duke was sitting in the beer hall when Hack Lawson comes in. He stomps right up to the bar and swigs three beers before he says a thing. You could tell he had one of his ugly spells on. All of a sudden he slams the bar with his big fist so that everybody in the pace jumps, and hollers, "Five to one! Who wants it?"

That's when Ed turns the place upside down. He planks down a stack of legal tender that would paper a five-room house and said, "At five to one, I bet four thousand dollars." Loud and clear so everybody in the place could hear it.

Hack looked like a swinging length of drill stem cracked him across the skull. He looked at the stack of bills and blinked. Then his little piggish eyes got greedy. You could shut your eyes and see him rub his hands together and drool. As soon as he got his wind back, he slammed his fist on the stack.

"Bet!" he hollered. "Who's next?"

The boys looked at Ed like he was fit for a jacket with buckles in the back. They didn't want any part of it.

After things settled down a little and Joe Harris, the farm boss, was holding the money, Ed let it come out just how he managed to raise that much.

For one thing, he sold his car. That was a thousand. He sold what he had left of a little river-bed farm he had hung onto for years. He always figured if things got too bad he could go back to the farm. That was twenty-five hundred. Somehow he got a last-minute plaster on his prize acreage that covered it to the last sprout of Johnson grass. That was five hundred. Ed didn't have a thing left that he could raise fifteen cents on.

One thing you could say about Ed Burk and the Duke, they made a good team. They was both as crazy as reservation Indians full of mountain hooch. After that fracas with Hack, the Duke was fired, and Ed Burk quit. They both retired like it was just a matter of days until they made their first million.

And they made as crazy-looking a pair as you ever saw. A big lean kid with that lazy, powerful look of a mountain lion. And Ed, a little guy—what hair he had was

white, hunched a little when he was walking, squirting tobacco juice every five steps. Where you saw one there was the other. Most of the time they was either out on that acreage of Ed's deciding where they'd sink their first hole, or sitting in the beer hall chewing the rag like they just couldn't decide how they was going to spend all the money they was going to make. Being a friend of Ed's, I usually sat with them when they was in the beer hall. But it didn't seem like it made any difference one way or the other if anybody talked to them or not.

Right up until the day before the fight everything was jake. Then came the blow that kicked over the dream derrick. That night I was sitting with Ed and the Duke when Hack Lawson came in the beer hall. I never seen him look so happy. He looked like he had just collected the insurance for murdering his grandmother. He thumped across the floor to our booth and looked down at us like a cat with his head in the canary cage. I moved over. I didn't want him to drool on me. He stuck his hands in his pockets and leered at us. I guess he thought it was a grin.

"Well," Hack says to the Duke, "do you ever get homesick for Chicago?"

You could get the same effect serving gin at a WCTU party. The Duke looked like he was trapped, with a wild well coming in.

Hack busted out with a laugh that rattled the beer mugs. He banged the table with his fist and roared. I caught my mug as it came down.

"How," Hack wheezed when he got his breath, "are your legs?" Then he was off again. Laughing fit to bust. "Ed," Hack says, wiping the tears out of his eyes, "I really ought to give your money back, but it will be a good lesson to you not to gamble." He's still laughing when he went out the door.

The Duke don't say a thing. He just sat there looking like a bloodhound with a head cold. He was careful not to look at Ed. He worked his mouth a few times. Finally, "I guess I should of told you. The reason I quit the fight game was because my legs went bad. I'm a three-round fighter."

I looked at Ed. His face was white. When he spoke it was low and a long way off.

"How did Hack know?"

The Duke lifted his head like he was pulling an anvil up with it. "It was in the papers. He must of seen it there." Then he looked at Ed. "I never figured on this. I figured I could get him the first three rounds."

I was just beginning to get the reason for all the black crepe. If Hack played hard-to-get for three rounds he'd have the Duke set up like a sick gnat on fly paper. I was thinking that over when I heard Ed talking. His voice was hard.

"You're a smart boy. You want a crack at the oil business. You don't care how wild a crack or how you get it." Ed jumped up and pushed me out of the way so he could get out of the booth. "Well, you've got your crack at it now, and it ain't costin' you a thing." He turned and walked fast for the door. I stood around until I couldn't stand the silence any longer. I mumbled something about everything was going to be fine and left.

I didn't see them again until the next night at the fights.

THE LEGION boys set the ring up in the ball park in front of the grandstand, with folding chairs for ring-side. The crowd was having themselves a time. Popcorn, peanuts, cokes. The usual thing was to buy a coke and pour two-thirds of it out. You re-fill the bottle out of the hip pocket.

I finally got through the crowd and got me a folding chair at one of the ring corners. I never did think of myself as being blood-thirsty, but I must of been to do a thing like that. Hack Lawson wasn't apt to take any pains about being neat.

The prelims went along nice. Just as the last one was over, the coke truck came in with another load. By the time Hack Lawson come across the field to the ring, they was sold out.

The crowd let out a big howl when Hack showed up. They don't especially like him but he always puts up a rough and bloody fight so they holler for him. The way they used to like to see guys fight lions, I guess. Hack had a big white robe hanging on his shoulders. He looked like a Tiger tank with a tarpaulin throwed over it. When he grabbed a rope and swung into the ring, you expected the whole works to tip over.

The Duke and Ed Burk come through the field and the crowd let out another howl. Ed was bringing up the rear looking like it was his last mile.

It turns out that I'm sitting in the Duke's corner. He takes off his robe and he looks pretty good. Then I take a look at Lawson and decide the Duke don't look so good after all. Lawson was pulling at the ropes and shaking the whole ring. The Duke and Ed don't do anything except look worried. They don't speak a word to each other.

The referee gets right down to business. He calls them to the middle and says something. The Duke and Hack nod and go back to their corners. The first thing you know somebody whams a bell and they are back in the middle. There ain't no talking this time.

The Duke comes out fast. He's got a job of work to do and he hasn't got all night to do it in. He gets in a left that crosses Hack's eyes for a minute. But he can't follow it up. Hack was making like a race horse. It don't take Hack all night to find out the Duke ain't nobody's slouch as long as his legs hold up. Hack is very careful to make the Duke run for every punch he gets in. And when he does get in a punch it don't do much good, because Hack is all shoulders and elbows. The bell rings and Hack don't throw a punch. Just runs.

The crowd was hollering fit to be tied. They was calling Hack everything in the book—and in Oklahoma they got a big book. I was doing some hollering myself. I was yelling at the Duke to watch Hack's knee, not to leave himself open. When he heard me he looked down and gave me a little grin. Then he waved. I didn't know what that was supposed to mean.

When they come out for the second, Hack gets right on his horse and goes on with the race. I seen better fights in Sunday School classes. The Duke could catch him but he couldn't hold him. Round and round they went. It was enough to make a guy dizzy. After about twenty laps the bell rings again and they went back to their corners. I couldn't be for sure, but it looked to me like the Duke was a little slower this time.

One thing the Duke had now was the crowd. They come to see a fight and they was giving Hack holy hell for not giving them one. I was hollering for the Duke just as loud as the next guy, but I knew I might as well be pulling for Mickey Mouse if he was fighting Joe Louis. The bell rings for the third.

The Duke shoots a look at Ed like to say, "This is it." Ed don't bat an eye. Ed was about as much help as a midget at a tug-of-war.

Before the bell's quit ringing the Duke's on top of Hack, swinging away. Blasting those big arms apart, trying to get to Hack's chin. A hard left to gut backs Hack in his corner. A right crashed between those raised arms, smashed Hack's nose, splattered blood. Another right over the ear started Hack to falling. The Duke took a short step back, blasted twice. Left! Right! Hack was on his hands and knees there in his corner, shaking his head. The referee stepped in, pushed the Duke away, and took the count from the guy at the bell. The crowd went crazy as the Duke went to his corner. His legs were beginning to wobble.

At the count of five Hack looked up. He wasn't hurt much, but his face was twisted and ugly. Blood was smeared on one side and that made it worse. He took the nine counts and got up. The referee wiped his gloves and he got back in the race. The Duke was getting slower.

When they went out for the fourth, things looked pretty bad. Hack wasn't running now. He was just keeping out of reach. As Duke's legs got weaker, Hack began to fight more like himself. He managed one rabbit punch that could of been bad. And he got in at least one low one before the referee called him on it. I was hollering my head off for the Duke to be careful, but Hack seemed to be satisfied for the time being. He let the Duke chase him for the rest of the round.

When the Duke comes back he's puffing hard. He drops on his stool like somebody chopped his legs from under him. He just sits there and blows until the bell rings again, then he grabs the ropes and pulls himself to his feet. I look at those wobbling legs and feel a little sick.

HACK is still careful when he comes out. He ain't taking chances. He's not going to let the Duke get close. I think I might as well go home. The Duke tries a

left that don't come off, then he just stands there on those rubber legs, guard high. I hear somebody cussing. It's me. With guys like Hack Lawson around you don't leave yourself open like that. It's just asking for a knee. Before I can holler, Hack sees it and moves in. He moves fast, in close, to get away from the referee. I see that big knee jump and things happen fast.

The Duke was caught. He couldn't get away from that knee. He didn't try. He just stood there and let Hack come into him, knee and all. At the same time Duke's right came back. Then I saw it. All of a sudden it came to me that the Duke was taking that knee just to get Hack in close one time before his legs folded.

He took it. That big knee smashing up, kicking all the color out of him, leaving him a pasty white. Just to see it made you want to double up and groan. At the same time there was another sound. A hard, wet, *thop* of leather on flesh. That smash to the gut doubled Hack. He stumbled back against the ropes, gasping. The Duke, half doubled, sick-looking, after him. Then it's all out, it's the pay-off. Sharp, wet spats, one after the other, like the cough of anti-aircraft. Hack was squirming on the ropes, trying to get away. Those sharp cracks of wet leather beating him down. The Duke took a half stumbling step back, brought his right with him. Then let it go. Fist, body, and all. I could tell by the sound that was all. Hack let the ropes slide up his back and melted to a puddle there on the canvas. One arm dangled outside the ring.

The referee was pushing the Duke back. He stumbled, almost fell. He took the ropes and followed them to the corner. He held himself up while the referee counted Hack Lawson out. Plank by plank, the crowd was tearing down the grandstand. Ed Burk was swinging on the Duke's gloved fist. His face was wet, and it wasn't raining.

Me and Ed lugged the Duke to the dressing room and stretched him out on the table. He was still one sick-looking boy. But he looks up and that crazy grin crawls across his mush. "Hack," he wheezes, "is quite a boy. He couldn't pass up a chance to use that knee." Before I could open my yap and tell him he was crazy to take a chance like that, him and Ed was back in the oil business. When they got to the part about making a million the first year, I gave up and went home.

That's one kind of people you want to keep away from. They're crazy. That wouldn't be so bad, but it's catching. Here I am strutting around smoking dime cigars like I had that green stuff crammed in every pocket. I ain't got one quarter to rub against the other. I'm waiting for this Burk-Hastings lease to start up. They said I could be farm boss.

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SALMON SWEEPSTAKES

ILLUSTRATED BY MONROE EISENBERG

Ash, caught in a fight he hadn't planned, tried in vain to get set. He was bigger than Don, but he'd never met anything like Don's fury.

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

THE STORY THUS FAR:

ALASKA hasn't changed much while DON CAMERON has been away fighting in World War I. Now—in 1920—it is still plenty tough. But Don's worries are personal and particular. One, has anyone filed a claim to the rich Chickwan River salmon run he'd discovered and cleaned out in '17? And, two, is he still married to SUE, the girl he'd courted, wed, quarreled with and separated from, all in three hectic weeks before he went away?

On his return to Ketchikan, Don is met by his old friend, THAD BOYLE, who tells him the Chickwan run is still undiscovered. Don looks forward to a harvest of half a million salmon.

Unable to find Sue, Don goes to see Mrs. NEVADA BAIRD, Sue's guardian and long a power in Alaska salmon fishing. Nevada tells him she has refused to give her consent to an annulment until Sue is old enough to know her own mind. Then Don receives a blow. He learns that ASH MOULTON, a ruthless operator in the can-

ning and fishing industries—who has been courting Sue in Don's absence—has filed for a trap-site on Chickwan. Don fights Ash on the main street of Ketchikan, Ash getting the better of the brawl—and Don publicly vows to get even, and drive Ash out of Alaska forever. He calls on ENOS SLOCUM, who agrees to lend him the money to buy a cannery in nearby Tamgas—and Nevada promises to sell him her fish. Don sees a chance to drive Ash out of business. But again Ash beats him to the punch. He persuades Slocum to withdraw his support. Don's position is apparently hopeless.

Meanwhile, MARTY BOYLE, Thad's ne'er-do-well brother, turns up in Ketchikan. Thad assumes that Marty, an inveterate horse-player, is down and out. But little Marty shows a strange interest in the salmon fishing game. He pesters Don with questions and finally comes out with an astonishing offer. Far from being broke, he is fresh from a run of luck at the tracks, and he will back Don to the tune of $25,000.

With Marty's backing, Don puts his cannery in operation at Tamgas, and begins to bid against Ash for fish. He meets Sue at Nevada's house and Sue explains why she left him right after their marriage. They had started for Tamgas from Ketchikan in Don's boat and had been caught in a gale. Sue was thrown to the deck and injured. After returning to Tamgas with Sue, Don had immediately gone out again to aid Thad, who was also in trouble. Sue had never forgiven him for leaving her then. And while she has since realized her selfishness, she is nevertheless convinced that their marriage was a mistake.

Despite his difficulty in getting enough fish for his cannery, Don hesitates to deal with the fish pirates who abound in Ketchikan, but he conceives the idea of freeing the fish in Ash's Chickwan trap to keep Ash from discovering how valuable Chickwan is. Ash becomes discouraged with the site and offers it for sale—but Don is not interested in buying what he feels is his by right.

A severe storm blows up in Surprise Passage. Don hears that Nevada and Marty are stuck on Nevada's Number Two trap, where they have gone to take supplies. And Nevada's gasboat has broken loose with Sue in it. With the fisherman LLOYD GEARY, Don sets out in his boat, the *Skookum*, to look for Sue. They find her driven into a small inlet, and, in the heavy seas, Don goes in with a light skiff and boards the gasboat. He repairs the dead engine and anchors the boat to wait out the storm. Marooned on the boat for two nights, Don and Sue do not achieve a reconciliation. When they return to Tamgas, they learn that Nevada and Marty have been rescued by Lloyd Geary—and that Ash has, meanwhile, taken 30,000 humpies from Chickwan. While Don has been rescuing Sue, Ash has discovered what a gold mine he has in the stolen trap-site.

PART III

DON'S cannery was shut down in mid-afternoon for want of fish. This was understandable after the gale but that evening the *Skookum* brought only 2,000 humpies. Don didn't expect Sockeye Sam to return, and Sam didn't, or any other pirate. The three purse seiners under contract brought small catches and the *Skookum* got only 4,000 from Halmar Jensen's trap.

The next day was no better. Lloyd Geary said purse seiners were cruising far and wide and finding nothing. Reports came from Ketchikan that all Southeastern Alaska was suffering from overfishing in the war years. Only thirty canneries were operating and none was doing well.

But Ash Moulton came to Tamgas and strode confidently down the street. In The Mug Up, Marty Boyle reported, Ash had told Nevada Baird he'd taken another 30,000 humpies from Chickwan and, with her traps, he'd put up a bigger pack in Sukoi Bay than in 1920.

Fish pirates, returning to harbor, now came up the channel from Sukoi Bay. Ash might be buying his own fish from them but he was filling cans. Don wasn't, and he didn't see how he could get enough even if the runs picked up. He'd cut himself off from the only other source of fish when he'd kicked Sockeye off the wharf.

Lloyd brought news that two of Ash's traps had been ripped out by the gale.

"Didn't put 'em on the beach," Lloyd said. "Set 'em back in the timber. No salvage there."

Don got no satisfaction out of it. Though Ash wouldn't have time to build and spot new traps before the runs ended, he was still getting plenty of fish. Nothing could stop him now, with Chickwan filling his tender every day.

Try as he would, Don couldn't keep his mind on his own certain failure. Every report of Ash's success led his thoughts to Chickwan and all he'd planned for it. He'd have made money, a lot of it, if the trap were his, but he thought more of the crime against the fish. After what he had done, the fish were entitled to an escapement big enough to keep the odd-year run alive and build it up. Now Ash's operations were killing any possibility of a run in 1923.

Don thought it over for a day and when the *Skookum* came in he took Lloyd aside. They talked for half an hour and when Lloyd left he said, "I've got trout tackle. Bart Stevens would rather catch cutthroats than all the salmon in Southeast."

Again the cannery ran only half a day.

Next morning Halmar Jensen moored his gasboat at the cannery float and walked to the office. His boyish blue eyes were pale and cold.

"Yesterday morning Ash came by," he said. "He tell me I keep my mouth shut he give me six cents for humpies. He say you can't pay any longer."

"He's lying!" Don said savagely.

Halmar didn't seem to hear. "I tell Ash I go see you first. And I ask Nevada. He say if I tell I get nothing even when you stop buying fish, which be pretty quick."

Don stiffened. So this was it. Ash didn't need more fish but he was trying to prevent Don from getting any.

"I just start my engine when Ash came," Halmar said. "I was coming to get grub. Four hours maybe. That all the time I leave my trap ever. Ash he go off in his fast boat and I come to town. I drink some beer and tell Nevada and buy grub and go back to the boat. After I get out of Tamgas I see the gasoline filler cap on the deck. It screwed in tight when I come to town and I think that funny. Then the engine quit. Spark all right. I prime her and she go. Then quit."

Halmar had been speaking carefully and slowly, as if trying to get every fact straight. Now he rushed on.

"Carburetor full of water," he said. "Feed line full. I draw gallon of water off before gasoline come. And it ain't fresh water like sometimes gets in gas. It salt water."

This was something different and Don jerked forward.

"Was Ash in town?" he asked.

"His boat was and I think about that when I get going again, pretty near dark. Three miles from my trap I see a small purse seiner and it turn away. I cut across and it is Sockeye's boat. So I know he rob my trap and I have good catch too."

He stopped and looked steadily at Don with cold eyes.

"They take my fish," he said. "Sockeye's boat she low in the water. Then they rip out the cotton web in both spillers. Rip out the hearts. Rip the wire web off the lead. They cut two cables and the trap is pretty near on the beach. Sockeye always say he get sometime but he needs Ash to help him."

He sat silent for a while. Don felt partly to blame for Halmar being dragged into the fight with Ash and said he'd advance money for new webbing and cable and a tug to bring the gear from Ketchikan and re-spot the trap. Halmar nodded and stood up.

"I got to tell Nevada too," he said. "She loan me thousand dollars."

CHAPTER X

A LESSON IN FISHING

DON felt sorry for Halmar. The fellow was so simple and honest, but Don quickly forgot that as he saw how this battle was developing. It had been dirty enough. Now Ash had asked for a knockdown and drag-out affair. Nothing like this had ever happened in Alaska, but Ash wasn't an Alaskan. And Ash had asked for something.

Halmar had come Saturday morning. That night purse seiners were in harbor for the closed week-end, when fishing was prohibited from six o'clock in the evening until six Monday morning. Fishermen and cannery workers crowded The Mug Up.

Don slept aboard the *Skookum*. The crew was ashore and before dawn, when the men might return, he and Lloyd slipped out of the harbor. Daylight found them in Surprise Passage.

"What'll we do if Bart gets tough?" Don asked.

"Get tougher," Lloyd said. "But he won't. He'll start ashore soon's he sees the trout rods."

In Chickwan they found Bart in bed and asked him aboard for breakfast. The trout gear was on the galley table.

"You boys going fishing?" Bart asked wistfully.

"Don ran down so you and me could," Lloyd said.

"Hurry that breakfast!" Bart shouted.

After they had eaten, Lloyd and Bart rowed ashore in the trap boat and Don pulled out of the cove. He went to mid-channel, drifted until his glasses failed to find any sort of craft, then returned to the trap. While he was opening the spillers and releasing thousands of humpbacks, Lloyd returned to the beach and rowed out.

"Bart was hell-bent for that pool two

miles up you told about," he said. "I stopped at the first one."

They worked swiftly. A hacksaw cut the wire anchor cables. Lloyd dumped Bart's food, blankets and gear into the trap boat and took it ashore with the skiff. By the time he returned, Don had a line fast to a corner of the trap and they began to tow it out of the cove.

It was slow work. They didn't make half a mile an hour until they were outside and the ebb caught them. Then, while Lloyd kept constant watch for boats in the passage, Don took the trap across the current until the tide would carry it into a mess of reefs. They cut it loose then, went out to sea and returned to Tamgas through another channel.

Back at the cannery in the afternoon, Thad took Don aside.

"Nevada was here," he said. "Old gal's all worked up. What's you been doing to her?"

"Nothing," Don said.

"Better think up some good answers. She was chawing on an inch wire cable and said for you to come see her."

Don could not think of anything that would concern Nevada, unless it were Halmar's trap. She might blame him for that, and she certainly was boiling about something when she opened the door and led him into the living room.

"I know most everything that goes on and I been checking on what I wasn't sure of," she began at once. "You didn't have to tell me to watch the tally on fish from my traps and Saturday night, when cannery workers from Sukoi Bay came to town, I had a couple o' good friends hang around with young Swanson, Ash's tallyman. He's a no-good kid but smart, unless he's drunk. Liquor fries his brains and my friends fried 'em plenty."

"How much have you been losing?" Don asked.

"Ten per cent, by the rough. I know a cannery tender in Ketchikan you can charter, and you'll need one. Go get it."

Don sat very still for a long moment. He'd been thinking only of Chickwan. Suddenly he was on his feet.

"When do I start getting your fish?" he asked.

"Tomorrow. I'm going to see Ash now."

"Your contract! Ash'll—"

For the first time Don saw Nevada show she was all Alaskan. The oaths let off a lot of pressure.

"I ain't signed a contract in twenty years!" she cried. "My word's better'n my scrawling. Only I expect the other feller's word's as good. Now get out. Get ready for a lot of fish."

She followed him to the door. "The price," she said. "It's what Ash gave me, not what you offered. I pay for my lessons."

Don turned to protest. She waved him on.

"Maybe you're good and maybe you ain't," she said, "but I got to take you whichever. That fightin' jaw of yours—I figured at first it would prove out. Now, knowing what happened to Halmar, and how—I thought you might get an idea. But that's none of my business."

Don hesitated. He knew what she meant but decided to keep still about Chickwan. News of it would get out soon enough.

Back at the cannery he told Thad and Marty what had happened. With Nevada's fish he was sure to put up a big pack.

"Play square with Nevada and you're jake in this town," Thad said. "Trick her and you'd better leave."

Marty didn't say anything at first. He sat tense, leaning forward, his head tilted back and lids slightly open.

"Comin' up on the outside!" he said in a strange excited voice. "Takin' the lead on the backstretch! Now it's a race!"

"Race hell!" Thad said. "It's hard work from here in. And order more cans in Ketchikan, Don. Be a sport about it. My gang can fill forty thousand cases."

DON and Lloyd went to Ketchikan and that night, when the tender had been chartered, Lloyd returned for the morning fishing. Don picked up a crew Monday and got back to Tamgas at supper time. He found Bart Stevens in the office. Here, he thought, is the blowoff. Bart had plenty on his side.

Bart looked at him steadily, until a grin spread across his face. "Knowing what Ash did to you at Chickwan, I wondered when you'd get a bright idea," he said. "I told Ash the wind musta loosened the anchors or something and the tide took the trap right out of the cove while I was getting me some eating fish. He

didn't seem to believe it. Nevada now—her trap would be mine if I was watchin' it. Ash—I got to work for somebody I like or leastways got respect for. You happen to have anything open?"

Don let his breath out then. "I've got a tender without a skipper," he said. "Lloyd told me you work traps fast."

A little later Marty came from The Mug Up for supper.

"Nevada said to tell you a blackfish got caught in a trap at Sukoi Bay and is rippin' all hell out of things," he said. "That mean anything to you?"

"Ash knows his Chickwan trap is gone," Don said. "What else?"

"She'll be here at five in the morning to go in your tender. Wants to tell the watchman you're to get her fish. Mind if I go?"

"I'd like to have you, Marty."

Next morning Nevada went to the wheelhouse as they pulled out. She started when she saw Bart in command but, after a quick glance at Don, said nothing. Bart looked at her and winked.

They reached Nevada's Number One trap in an hour. As they circled to come alongside against the tide, the watchman did not appear. Bart tooted his whistle with no result.

"Now what's up?" Nevada said. "His boat's at the trap."

She went out to the foredeck as they lay along the big log frame and looked into the spillers. They were empty. Two of the crew jumped to the trap and made fast.

"Look in the shack," Nevada ordered. "What's on the bunk?"

They found the watchman, legs and arms bound and lashed to his bed. A cheek had been cut and his nose was puffed. He was stiff and sore when released but hobbled out to talk to Nevada.

They found the watchman, legs and arms bound and lashed to his bed.

"Sockeye," he said. "I couldn't handle the three of 'em."

"Why didn't you shoot 'em?" Nevada demanded.

"The rifle was gone. I kept it behind the door. It was there at noon 'cause I oiled it."

"Then someone else was here," Nevada said. "Who?"

"Nobody except Ash and his tender, 'bout dark. Picking up fish 'cause the tender had to go to Ketchikan tomorrow."

They got the watchman aboard and worked out the story. He'd gone to the spiller when Ash's crew got ready to brail. Maybe someone had got off the tender and gone to the shack. He wasn't thinking of that, it being Ash's crew.

"Ash went into the shack and dropped the rifle into the water," Don said. "Did he take the fish?"

"No, Ash changed his mind. Said he'd pick 'em up on the way back if he had room. They left and I went to bed. When Sockeye came I reached for the gun. It was gone. Sockeye came bargin' right in and when I went out to stop 'em they jumped me." He looked apologetically at Nevada. "Three of 'em," he said. "I kept 'em busy long's I could."

"'Course you did!" Nevada exclaimed warmly. "And I'll get you a new rifle. Only use it on Ash Moulton soon's you would on Sockeye. Don, get on to the next trap."

The tender went to Number Two. The story was essentially the same, Ash coming first, then going on. Only the pirate was not Sockeye but another. Before the tender got under way again Nevada and Don knew what they'd find at traps Number Three and Four, and they did.

"Maybe I'm dumb after all," Nevada said, "but I never heard of anything like this happening in Alaska before."

Don knew how it had happened. As soon as Nevada canceled her contract, Ash got busy. He'd already hooked up with Sockeye and his gang and that night he disarmed the watchmen so the pirates could raid all of Nevada's traps. Sockeye would raid them for nothing if he could hurt Nevada.

But the raid itself didn't bother Don so much as what it promised. The Tamgas district was off in a little corner by itself. The weekly mail boat was the only regular contact with Ketchikan. The U. S. commissioner and marshal rarely came unless sent for, and Tamgas always had been a quiet place. Now Ash, working with Sockeye and his gang, wouldn't stop with what he had done. Ash had to go on and finish this or be wiped out.

DON'S chartered tender returned to Tamgas without a salmon aboard. They hadn't talked much on the return trip because of the strange crew. Don's feelings were mixed. He now had enough fish to put up on a good pack. Ash, without Chickwan, Nevada and two of his traps, was suddenly in a position where he faced complete failure, and Ash, on his record, wasn't quitting there.

At the cannery Don found Thad and Lloyd and they joined Nevada and Marty in the office. Nevada, instead of pacing the floor and cursing Ash, sat quietly at Don's desk. Her face was again smooth and rosy and her eyes blue and twinkling.

"You and your horses!" she said to Marty. "Salmon have got 'em beat. Ever see your nags stop and the jockeys start a free-for-all on the track?"

"The dirty work's done out o' sight," Marty said. "You got to be smarter to win."

"And here it's the man with the heaviest fist," Nevada said. She looked at the others. "Yeah, we're all friends. What's Ash going to do next?"

"He can't do anything," Thad said. "Don's got the fish."

"This is no machine you can tinker and patch, Thad," she said. "It's humans, desperate and sore and crooked. Sockeye hates my guts. Ash stands to lose everything he owns."

"Why don't you have these pirates arrested?" Marty asked.

Nevada looked at him pityingly and the others chuckled.

"Because no fish pirate's ever been found guilty by a jury in Alaska," she said. "One judge even decided any fish alive and swimming belongs to the man who takes it. There's only two ways to stop pirates. Have the packers keep their promises not to buy from 'em or—" she looked at Don and Lloyd, patently weighing their physical ability—"or get rougher'n they do."

"Funny Sockeye didn't tear out your web like he did at Halmar's," Thad said.

Don thought he knew the reason but he didn't tell it. Sockeye and his gang had to play along with Ash and take his orders or leave the district, and Ash had to get Nevada's fish or he was through. Ash didn't want her traps wrecked. He had another scheme in mind.

"Can you get more rifles?" Thad asked Nevada.

"If not, buckshot's as good," she said. "Guns'll be on the traps before dark. And won't my boys use 'em after getting handled so rough!"

"If you'll loan your gasboat and dig up a good man, Lloyd and he can patrol your traps and Halmar's at night," Don said. "Only we'll have to pay Lloyd more'n he'd make purse seining."

"Like to be on my side again, Lloyd?" Nevada asked with a smile. "And I pay to win a war or for making mistakes. I'm going to The Mug Up and start lining up my spies. We got to know what Ash is doing, and you can count on him hitting hard and quick."

Don walked with her to the planked street.

"I've got two reasons for asking this," he said. "Where's Sue stand?"

"How'd I know?" she said. "You know my system. I don't mess in other people's affairs or yank 'em off hot stoves."

That didn't sound good. If Sue knew what Ash was doing, and Don didn't see how she could avoid knowing, that's the way it was and he couldn't do anything about it. As he started away, Nevada called.

"So many things been happening," she said, "I ain't told you I appreciate yanking my gasboat off the rocks. Only I'd rather lose a hundred gasboats than what was in that one."

"I didn't go after your gasboat," he said.

She studied him, smiled. "Nobody knows what goes on inside a woman," she said. "Not even me."

That afternoon Lloyd took Nevada's gasboat out of harbor to distribute firearms to her traps. Don and Thad talked over plans for increased production. Fish would be coming in and must be handled. Thad felt better when he learned Don had ordered cans for ten thousand more cases.

"This gang'll break the record for a one-line cannery if they get something to put in the cans," Thad said.

CHAPTER XI

PIRATE TRAP

THAT night Don was ready to get to bed early. He hadn't talked much. He'd been thinking what Ash might do and how to stop him and he'd decided his defenses were good. Having Nevada on his side helped a lot. He even saw how she'd really been on his side from the first. She'd given him hints, he understood now, or had stood aside so he'd have a fair chance.

Marty sat in the office, rarely speaking. He seemed to be asleep, and then his tilted chair hit the floor.

"There's Ash's boat," he said.

Don listened, wondering what Ash was doing in Tamgas at this time. Sockeye and the other pirates had left for their night's work. Maybe Ash had come to see Sue.

He thought of this while he read the timekeeper's reports. They weren't good but they'd be far better soon. All he needed was a steady flow of fish and he'd put up 40,000 cases. As he laid the reports aside a boy entered.

"Nevada says for you to come to The Mug Up," he said.

It was ten o'clock and Don thought this must be important. As he went out he heard Marty call the boy.

Tamgas had no street lights. Stores were closed and only The Mug Up was open. Charley looked up in surprise as Don went through to the back room.

The place was lighted but empty. Nevada was not at her usual table and the others were unoccupied. Don stopped, and the door was slammed shut behind him. He turned and saw Ash, Sockeye and a couple of other fish pirates.

Ash didn't speak. He came in, swinging, throwing all his weight behind his punches. Don ducked, came up with an uppercut to Ash's ribs. Ash grunted but didn't stop. He knew all about this sort of thing and he wasn't wasting time. In the past he'd been dirty too.

Don thought of this and more as he

circled a table. Ash and the pirates weren't just out to beat him up. If they were to go on catching and packing fish they had to put him out of business. Not for now but for good. He threw a chair at Ash, tipped a table over and wrenched at a leg.

All four came in then, from front and sides. Don dodged, tripped on a chair and fell. He rolled forward, grabbed at legs, jerked a man down. He jumped up nearer the door but Ash cut him off. A pirate came in and Don hit him so hard he crashed into a table, which collapsed.

Ash charged from the rear then, Sockeye from a side. Don fought with a desperate fury that kept them off for a few moments. Ash faced him, jabbing, waiting for an opening. Don knew his only chance was to carry the attack to Ash but as he got set, Sockeye jumped onto his back. Ash stepped in with a clip to the jaw and Don went down.

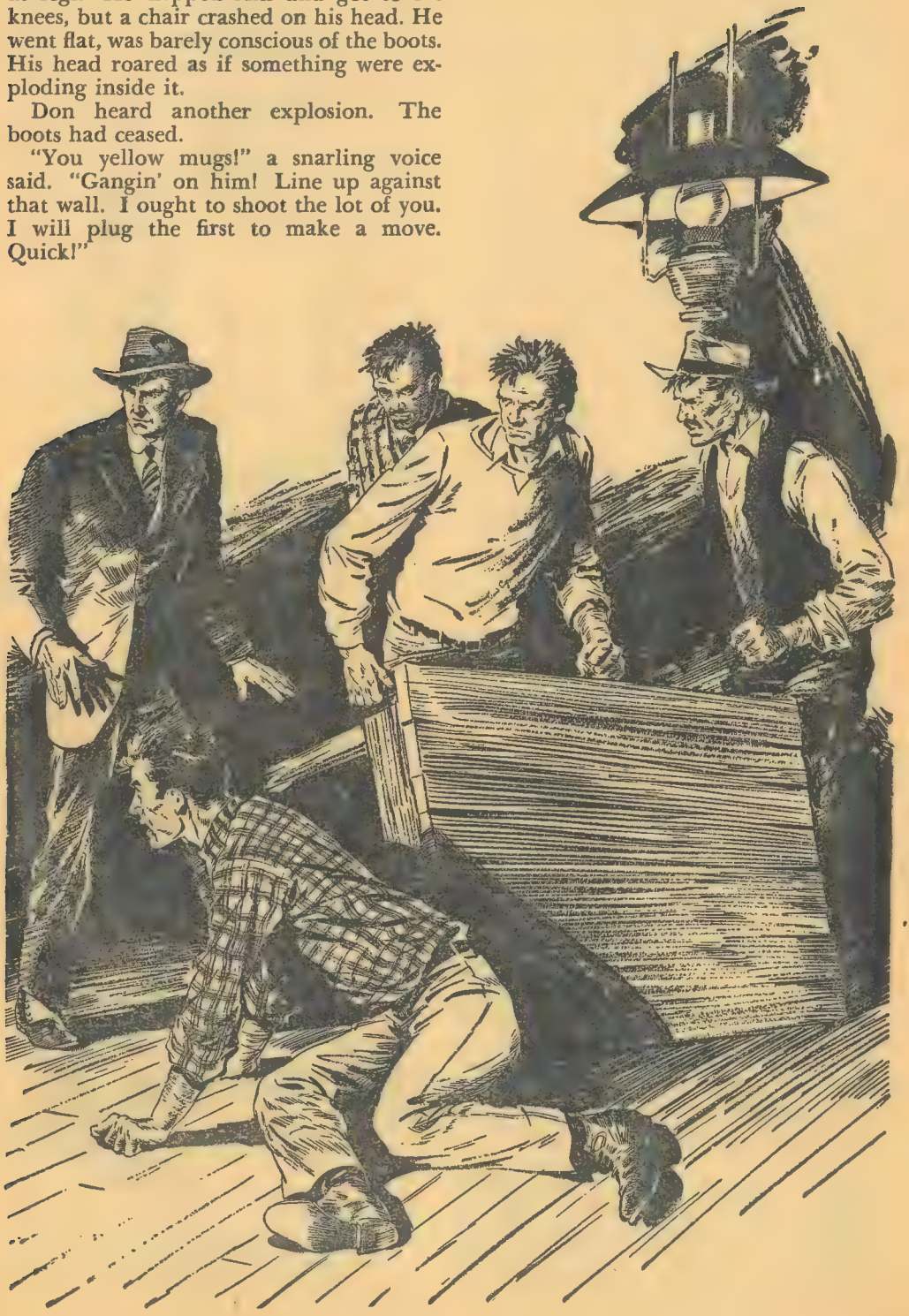
He felt their boots then, on the ribs, in the face. He got to his knees but Ash sent him sprawling, and the boots took up their work. Don knew this meant the end, not only for Chickwan and his cannery but for himself. He threw himself one way,

"You yellow mugs!" a snarling voice said. "Line up against that wall."

the other, tried to get under a table, jerked at legs. He tripped Ash and got to his knees, but a chair crashed on his head. He went flat, was barely conscious of the boots. His head roared as if something were exploding inside it.

Don heard another explosion. The boots had ceased.

"You yellow mugs!" a snarling voice said. "Gangin' on him! Line up against that wall. I ought to shoot the lot of you. I will plug the first to make a move. Quick!"



An explosion roared again. Don lifted his head and saw Marty holding an automatic pistol. Or was it Marty? His face was not expressionless now. Rage had pulled muscles and skin into a grotesque, vengeful shape.

"You all right, kid?" he asked, glancing at Don.

Sockeye leaped instantly, striking at the pistol arm. Marty moved so swiftly Don was still calling a warning when the gun crashed against Sockeye's head. The fish pirate sprawled on his face and lay still.

"You other rats!" Marty snarled. "Face the wall. Get your hands up. Higher, Moulton, or I'll nail you there with lead."

Slowly and painfully, Don rose to his feet. He was dizzy and pain stabbed everywhere. He staggered to a chair.

Charley opened the door and looked in cautiously. Suddenly he was catapulted into the room and Thad, wearing only his underwear, jumped past him with a shotgun ready. He stared in amazement at Marty and then grinned.

"You're a Boyle, all right," he said.

Feet tramped through the restaurant. Brad Stevens came, and behind him flocked half the town. None knew what had happened and as soon as they saw Marty the questions poured out. More arrived, crowding through the door. Suddenly Marty raised his gun.

"Stop him!" he shouted, and fired over their heads.

Ash wasn't being stopped. He leaped into the crowd, bulled his way through the door and was gone.

Ten minutes later things were fairly well straightened out. The men of Tamgas knew what had happened and Sockeye had come to and was set on his feet. Marty was loud in his demand that the fish pirates be thrown into jail, but since there was no jail, since Sockeye was bleeding heavily from a split scalp and the other two were cut and bruised, the crowd seemed to think they'd had enough.

"Halmar Jensen'll do all that needs doin'," a fisherman said.

THAD, Marty and Bart took Don to the cannery and put him to bed. They found plenty of bruises but no broken ribs. Boot soles had cut his face and scalp and perhaps smashed his nose.

Thad, wearing only his underwear, jumped past him with a shotgun ready.

"You ain't pretty, and you'll be sore for a day or two, but nothing to keep you from packing fish," Thad said. "How'd you happen in on this, Marty?"

"The kid sounded phony," his brother said, "and I knew Nevada never went to The Mug Up at night. I grabbed him by the neck and he 'fessed up a man had sent him, so I called you."

"They'd have kicked me to death if you hadn't come," Don said. "Ash figured how, with me out, the cannery'd close."

Next morning Nevada came. Don was up, despite aches and bruises that made movement difficult.

"Sure," Nevada said. "If he stayed in bed he'd get so stiff he couldn't budge. So Ash tried to put you out of business."

"It's his only chance," Don said.

"Yeah, he's in a hole and it's only human to try getting out. Point is, what's he going to do next?"

"What can he do?" Thad asked. "Don's got most of the fish now and we'll keep pirates away from your traps."

"That's the way it looks," she said. "But Ash has already done things no fish packer in Alaska ever thought of. What's to keep him from thinking up something more?"

She got up to go. Don wanted to ask what Sue thought of all that had happened. No one in Tamgas could escape knowing. But he felt Nevada wouldn't tell.

That afternoon Don's tender brought in a full load of fish from Nevada's traps and reported that Halmar's trap would be fishing again in a couple of days. Don's purse seiners also did well and the cannery ran until late at night.

Don kept moving all day, though it took effort. Every muscle ached but he didn't want to stiffen up. He couldn't afford to. He walked out to the fish house at the end of the wharf when the tender came and while he was there he saw that none of the fish pirates' boats was in harbor. They'd always lain at a float, brazenly, because only pirates work at night. Now, Don thought, they tied up as brazenly at the Sukoi Bay cannery.

That night Don saw the purse seiners in harbor. It was bright moonlight and every craft stood out. The next night it was the same. Don, walking around the plant, keeping his muscles moving, looked them over again, checking each boat. While he stood there he heard Ash's runabout, soon saw the silver of moonlight on the churning wake and the boat itself as it was made fast to a float. Ash, coming to Tamgas after dark, wasn't out for a moonlight ride. Don patrolled the wharf, trying to figure what Ash might be up to. After an hour he heard the powerful motor break into a roar and saw Ash swirling out of the harbor and turning toward Sukoi Bay.

It was late when he entered the office. Everyone had gone to bed. He sat at his desk to puzzle out what Ash could do. He put himself in Ash's place and tried to work himself into a crooked, desperate state of mind, but it did no good. He stopped this when he heard a light tap at the door. Instantly he was alert.

"Come in," he said, ready to spring.

The door opened and Sue stepped inside. She looked at him a moment, then closed the door and came to the desk.

HER eyes were troubled when she saw his bruised and cut face.

"What happened?" she cried, and her voice was troubled too.

"You know," he said.

"How could I? I haven't seen you since we came back."

"Everybody in Tamgas knows."

"But I haven't seen anyone. I haven't been out of the house."

"Nevada must have told you."

He didn't try to make it easy for her. Ash had just left Tamgas. This was part of a new scheme.

Sue got a chair, put it on the other side of the desk and sat down. Her face was in the bright light now. It was pale, stiff with resolution, as if she were determined to carry through a disagreeable task. That would be it, he thought. Ash had driven her to it. His eyes were hard as he waited.

"Nevada hasn't told me anything the last few days," she said. "Not since she decided to sell her fish to you."

"Did she tell you why?"

"Yes."

Her eyes didn't waver. She looked at him as she had that second day in the gasboat, with the same courage and honesty.

"Stop asking questions," she said. "It's hard enough, what I've got to say. It was

hard enough coming here. But I had to! Maybe I'm betraying someone but it'll have to be that. I've been fighting myself over it and there was only one way out."

He didn't speak. Not because she'd asked him but because she was suffering, was driving herself to this.

"Ash came tonight," she said after a long pause. "He left a little while ago. He wanted—but that has nothing to do with this. He was excited, angry. I never heard him talk so. He has always been sure of everything. Tonight he said he was being persecuted. That you had wrecked his Chickwan trap out of pure spite. That you had lied to Nevada and got her to break her contract. Is that true?"

Don stared back steadily. He didn't trust Ash Moulton in any way but he could not escape Sue's sincerity.

"Did Ash just say this or did he prove it?" Don asked.

"He was angry. It came tumbling out."

"Get him to prove it and I'll talk."

"Oh!" she cried. "Why are you so stubborn? So bullheaded? Can't you see I'm only trying to tell you something?"

Don found that too much. He leaned across the desk as the angry words poured out.

"Tell me something!" he said savagely. "Did Ash tell you how he stole my trap site? How he got Slocum to quit backing me? How he asked Nevada to lie . . .?"

Sue's anger matched his own. "Stop it!" she cried. "You've told me nothing else."

"Then listen to this. Did Ash tell you how he poured water into Jensen's gas tank and got Sockeye Sam and his gang to wreck Halmar's trap? Did he tell you how, soon's Nevada canceled her contract, he stole the rifles from her four traps and then turned the fish pirates loose to rob her of every fish in them? Did he tell you how he sent word that Nevada wanted to see me and then he and three pirates tried to beat and kick my life out? Did he tell you how all the fish pirates are lying at his wharf every day and working for him at night? Did he tell you how Nevada broke her contract because she caught him knocking off ten per cent on her tally?"

It jolted her, but only for a moment.

"Can you prove that?" she asked furiously.

"Every word. Ask Halmar Jensen, Lloyd Geary, Bart Stevens, Marty Boyle. Ask Nevada."

Sue sat very still. Her anger was gone. He thought he could almost see her mind readjusting itself. And then he caught a glimpse of her courage as she looked up, and it maddened him that so fine a quality was being wasted on Ash Moulton.

"I never heard any of that," she said. "And I won't ask anyone if it's true. I don't care any more. My reason for coming—it's because of something Ash said tonight. When he was angry, and demanding—when he was trying to prove something. He said he wasn't taking all this lying down, that—"

"Taking it!" Don exclaimed. "The dirty—"

"Stop!" she cried. "Can't you see I don't want to do this? Only I have to? Ash said he wasn't beaten. Said he couldn't be. With no other canneries near, he'd get all the fish when Sukoi Bay was the one plant left."

"What's he mean, one plant?"

"I'm telling what he said. I didn't know what he meant. I thought you had failed, couldn't get money. So I asked him and what he told me—that's why I had to come."

She stopped. Her distress was greater than his anger, and he steeled himself against the plea he felt sure she would make.

"Ash was desperate," she said after a moment. "Raging! He shouldn't have said what he did but he trusted me. That's what makes it so hard for me now."

She straightened in her chair and her voice was clear and firm when she went on. "He said plenty of people hated you and that you couldn't pack fish in a heap of ashes."

She looked at him steadily for a moment and then she was on her feet, walking swiftly to the door. Don started to rise and a jab of pain slammed him back into the chair. The door closed before he could get up but he crossed the room and hurried onto the wharf. He heard Sue's swift footsteps on the planked street and saw her dimly.

Don walked to the end of the wharf. The harbor was brilliant in the moonlight and he could see each house in the village, with the mountains hanging above it and

the green forest pressing in to regain what it had lost. He could even see Sue hurrying up the draw.

A cloud drifted across the moon. It was only a patch of vapor but it drove from the southeast. Tonight, in the moonlight, Ash would not dare come. But with rain and a low overcast, in the darkness that only the walled pits of Southeastern Alaska can know, Ash and his fish pirates would have their chance.

Don was surprised by his mood. He didn't see this as a blow that would wreck him. It was an opportunity. And Sue, being so damned honest, had come to him. Maybe she'd come only because she was honest and square, but she had come. He didn't feel an ache or a pain as he went to bed.

Sockeye Sam

CHAPTER XII

HOMESTRETCH

NEXT morning he called Thad, Marty and Lloyd into the office. He was certain no one had seen Sue come to the cannery and he spoke bluntly.

"Ash is planning to burn this cannery," he said. "Only reason he hasn't tried before was because of the moonlight. Now, raining, it'll be black as pitch tonight."

"Burn it!" Thad exclaimed. "How you know that?"

"What else is there for him to do? What's he balked at yet? With no cannery here, he'll get all the fish in the district."

"Sounds like something out o' the feedbox," Marty said.

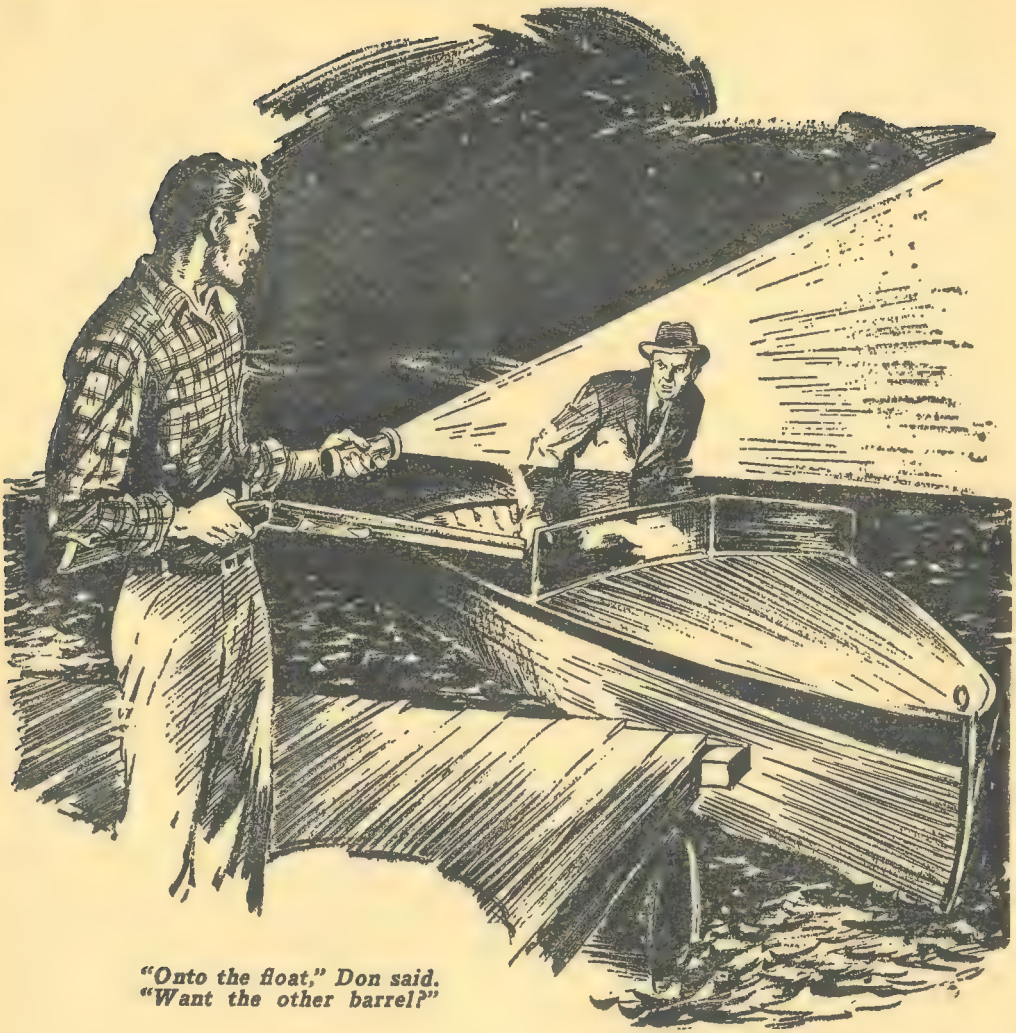
For once Don understood what the horse player meant. "It is," he said, "and that's all you'll know."

It was like planning a battle. Don expected the attack that night. Ash had never delayed in the past. Thad thought the cannery would be reached from land but Don and Lloyd didn't. If a fire was set at the fish house, the southeast wind would carry it through the entire plant, and with a good blaze started, nothing could stop it. A better escape lay by the water and Ash and his gang would have to get back to Sukoi Bay.

They decided to pick Bart Stevens and four men Thad could trust, tell no one else. The engineer would be kept on duty with steam up. Fire hose would be laid out after the crew had gone to bed. Enough guards would be placed so no one, even in the darkness, could get to the cannery. A couple of shotguns and three revolvers were dug up and half a dozen flashlights. All plans were laid before noon. After that the fish began to come in such numbers the cannery would be running until late.

The night was as dark as Don had expected. Lights in the cannery were not out until midnight. The weary crew went to bed and the guards began their patrol.

Don was so confident Ash and his gang would come he was not surprised when, beneath the hiss of rain on water and noise of the wind, he heard the faint click of an oarlock off the end of the wharf. He waited, crouched beside a bollard. He could not see anything and the sound was not repeated. He wondered if he had actually heard it, if he should warn the others. As he stood up, shouts came from the face of the wharf. A shotgun roared. Lights flashed dimly in the rain.

Don started back, heard oarlocks. They were hurried, loud, and a bit clumsy. He ran around the cannery to the street, on to the floats. He chose the first, knowing his shotgun would carry across to the second, and ran out to the end. He was still gasping, and feeling for the first time the stabs

"Onto the float," Don said. "Want the other barrel?"

of pain in legs and ribs, when he heard oarlocks again, then a crash as a rowboat struck the float thirty feet nearer shore. As he went back the unmistakable sound of Ash's runabout motor roared beside him. He snapped on his flash to see Ash leaping for the seat and the controls.

Don fired into the boat. The light showed a thick stream of water gushing up before he turned it on Ash.

"Onto the float," Don said. "Want the other barrel?"

He poked the shotgun out past the light and drove Ash ashore and back to the cannery.

The place was lighted brilliantly, outside and in. Lloyd and Bart had Sockeye and another pirate backed against the wall near the Iron Chink. Beside Lloyd was a can of gasoline. Don motioned Ash to stand beside his pals.

"Where you been?" Lloyd demanded. "Thad and Marty thought you'd got knocked off the wharf."

"Go find 'em," Don said.

Before Lloyd returned with the Boyles, the men of Tamgas began arriving. They'd heard the shots and saw the cannery lighted, wanted to know what was up.

"Nothing we can't handle," Don said.

Men kept coming, fishermen, cannery workers, townspeople. Don refused to an-

swer questions and when Thad and Marty returned they herded the prisoners into the office and shut the door.

"We'll tie 'em up!" Thad shouted. "Get the marshal."

"No," Don said.

He looked at the prisoners. When he spoke it was to Sockeye.

"You didn't think this up," he said. "But you knew Ash was finished and you'd want a place to sell fish."

Sockeye started. He even nodded slightly.

"All right," Don said. "Ash pulled you into it. You got caught. You can't dodge jail with all these witnesses. That can of gas. Unless you turn state's evidence."

"Nobody'll believe a damned fish pirate!" Ash shouted.

"Anybody'll believe us. You squealing, Sockeye?"

Sockeye didn't have to say yes. He was a sorry-looking object with a dirty bandage on his head.

"That's prison, Ash," Don said. "Like it?"

Ash blustered and threatened, and Don beat him down. When Ash was silent, Don spoke.

"There's no trap at Chickwan," he said. "I could file and put one in, only you'd tie it up in court. So you're selling the site to me. Tonight. For one dollar. Write out a bill of sale. Leave plenty of room for Sockeye and Lloyd and a couple more to sign as witnesses."

"A dollar!" Ash said. "No!"

"A dollar and walking out of here."

It didn't come then, but it came. In fifteen minutes Chickwan was back in Don's hands and Ash and the two pirates were gone.

"Now we can get some sleep," Don said.

Maybe the others slept but Don didn't for a couple of hours. Once more he owned Chickwan. Millions of salmon whose lives he'd made possible wouldn't be destroyed. They wouldn't go into another man's cans. And all this was because of what Sue had done. That kept him awake longer than Chickwan.

NEXT morning the cannery started work as usual but by night Don faced a new problem. Pink salmon had started coming in from the open sea again. Nevada's traps were jammed. Halmar respotted his trap and by night he had 10,000 humpies. Purse seiners came in with hulls low in the water. And that wasn't all. Fishermen who'd been selling to Ash brought loads to Tamgas. They said Ash hadn't paid them for a week. Before night Don had taken 35,000 fish.

The crew worked fifteen hours but in that time could pack only 1,500 cases, could handle only 22,000 fish. Next day 30,000 fish were delivered. Don took them only because it was Saturday and he could pack through the closed week-end. His crew couldn't keep up this pace. Saturday night he went to Nevada's house.

Sue was in the living room, reading. She said, "Hello," and turned to leave.

"Nothing you can't hear," Don said. "I only want advice."

He told Nevada his problem.

"Turn away those who've been selling to Ash," she said. "It's all you can do."

"But they're fishermen. Ash hasn't been paying them. They're trying to work out of bad times, get enough to eat on. They're Tamgas men."

Nevada smiled. "I've always said a fish packer ought to be a fisherman first. You've got to buy a cannery. If there's not one to sell, there should be."

"I had that figured out," Don said. "Only it takes money."

"You get smarter every time you open your mouth," Nevada said. "What you think Ash would ask?"

"He's broke. Can't go on."

"Get after him. I wouldn't say so with any other packer I ever knew. But he's asked for this."

"It's got to be cash. Right now—"

"If you're asking for a loan, say so."

"I'm not," Don said. "I thought you'd buy him out."

"No," Nevada said instantly. "I'm through packing fish."

Sue laid her book aside. "How much will it be?" she asked.

"The hole he's in, Ash'd take twelve-fifteen thousand and skip the country and his creditors," Nevada said.

"I have twelve thousand," Sue said. "And there's the eleven hundred Don and the government sent me. Would that be enough?"

Nevada didn't look at Sue. "You can try it," she said.

"Mean you want to buy him out?"

"No," Sue said. "I want—it's the only square thing—to loan you the money."

She went out of the room and Don heard her on the stairs. But she didn't come back. Nevada talked of fish and how the runs were picking up again, how back in 1910 it had been much the same. Sue called from the upper floor and Nevada went out. After a while she came back with a check.

"Sue's gone to bed," she said. "Sent you this." Nevada looked at the slip of paper and a slow smile spread across her face. Don thought he'd never seen a smile so sweet. "Maybe my system was all right," she said, "though a couple o' weeks ago I was sure I'd been dead wrong. This money, it ain't due her till she's twenty-one. What her dad left. But when Ash got hard up he asked her to get it and loan it to him. I thought if she was that big a fool there was nothing I could do, and let her have it."

"But why didn't she loan it to Ash?"

"My system got to work. Sue started to learn."

Don took the check and folded it slowly. "You ain't as smart as you think you are," he said. "Nobody learns overnight how to be as square as Sue is. And one thing can't be taught or learned either, and that's plain guts."

"Run along and buy your cannery."

Back in his office, Don told Marty he had money to buy Ash's plant. "Maybe I should have let you in on this," he said, "but the way it worked—"

"I laid my bet," Marty broke in. "I never cover or lay more'n I figured." He paused as if considering something. "Besides, I've found out fish are different 'n horses. It's the boy more'n what's under him that wins races."

Don bought Sukoi Bay two days later. Ash scoffed and argued but it was his one chance for salvage in the wreck. Yet when he did give in it was at a time Don chose. Don didn't want Ash at Sukoi Bay after the papers were signed and he arranged that payment would be made in Tamgas.

The boat did not get in till nearly dark. All the town was on the cannery wharf. Nevada and Sue were there with Marty.

"He seems to think this is some sort of finish," Nevada said. "Says he got club house seats for us, whatever that means."

AFTER the boat had tied up, Don gave Ash a check in exchange for the bill of sale and walked with him to the gangplank. Ash saw Sue.

"You dirty little double-crosser!" he exclaimed furiously.

Don hit him, smack on top of the last word. He hit him again, on the jaw. He feinted with a left and buried his fist in Ash's midsection. The first two blows were instinctive, the next two planned. The next thirty were thrown from anywhere to anywhere. Ash, caught in a fight he hadn't planned and couldn't control, tried in vain to get set. He was bigger than Don, knew far more of boxing, but he'd never had Don's fury, or met anything like it.

Back and forth across the wharf they went. The crowd fell away. Cannery workers and mail boat crew whooped and yelled. In the beginning Don thought only of the insult to Sue, and then, as Ash's blows lacked steam, as he began to cover up, Don remembered how he'd promised to get his Chickwan trap and Ash's cannery and boats and traps and gear besides, and then load Ash aboard a ship bound for the outside, load him as raw beef.

Ash looked like that now. His face was cut and bloody. He swayed, cowered with his arms over his head. Don worked on his middle until the arms came down, then measured the last one. Ash fell.

He'd scarcely hit the planks before Don had him by the collar and was dragging him onto the little ship.

"I'll pay the freight on this," he said.

"Freight!" the purser said. "That's not—"

"Twenty cents a hundred!" the skipper called from the bridge. "I heard what you told him in Ketchikan last spring, Don."

Don pushed through the crowd into the cannery and hurried to the office. From a desk drawer he took a can of salmon, felt for the file mark on the rim and slipped it into a pocket. He went out to the planked street, waited in the dark while the mail boat pulled out and the people of Tamgas began to file past. When he heard familiar voices he stepped out.

"I want to see you, Sue," he said.

"Sure," Nevada said. "Marty'n me got the whole race to talk over and we're stopping in The Mug Up."

"And we got tickets to cash," Marty said.

Sue waited until they had gone.

"What about?" she asked shortly.

"Your money," he said. "I haven't seen you since—"

"I loaned it. You've used it."

"It's no loan. It's an investment. Gives you a share."

"No," she said. "I won't take that."

They walked on, past The Mug Up.

"There's only one other way out," Don said.

"What do you mean?"

"I got to marry you."

"Marry me!" she cried. "We're already—"

"What I said. Marry you! You! Not the girl I married four years ago. You're somebody else."

She stared at him. It was moonlight and she could see his face. Suddenly she walked on.

"You mean you like me fried," she said. "On a hot stove."

"We've both been on one," he said. "You—I started all over again the first time I saw you in Tamgas. Every time I saw you it was two different people, the Sue I'd known and the one you are now. I'd get sore at the old one and crazier about the new you. Even Ash—I could understand that. I was dead far's you cared. With a girl—I guess there's got to be somebody. Ash could talk and he was big and going places and a good looker. I never blamed you. When I got sore it was because anybody so fine—falling for that— You'd wasted one chance and I didn't want you to waste another."

He stopped, suddenly aware he'd said a lot. In his confusion, his arm struck the can in his pocket. He pulled it out.

"What's that?" she asked.

"The first can of salmon I ever packed," he said. "I told you once I'd be a packer and give you the first to come off the line. You said you'd tie ribbons on it and keep it forever."

He drew back his arm. She reached for it but he swung above her head and hurled the can far up the mountainside.

"Don!" she cried. "I want that!"

Something in her voice, in the way she stood there in the moonlight, something in her face he'd never seen before—he only knew his arms were around her and she was clinging to him.

"Don Don!" she said. "I was such a little fool! I kept telling myself I hated you. When you came back—it must have been a habit. Because now I know I didn't."

At last she pushed free.

"No," he said. "The can's gone. Everything up to now is out. And tomorrow we go to Ketchikan. Get married."

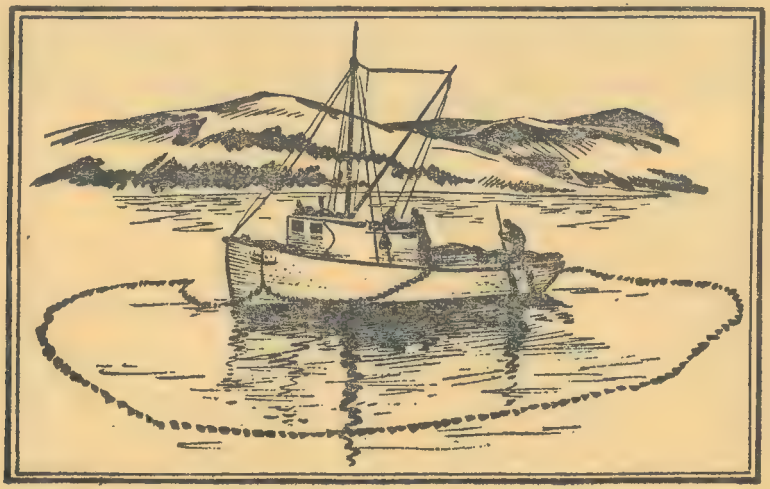
"But that's so silly when—"

"We're starting fresh. All fresh. Never taking a look over the stern. We'll borrow Nevada's gasboat and soon's the preacher does his job we'll pile aboard."

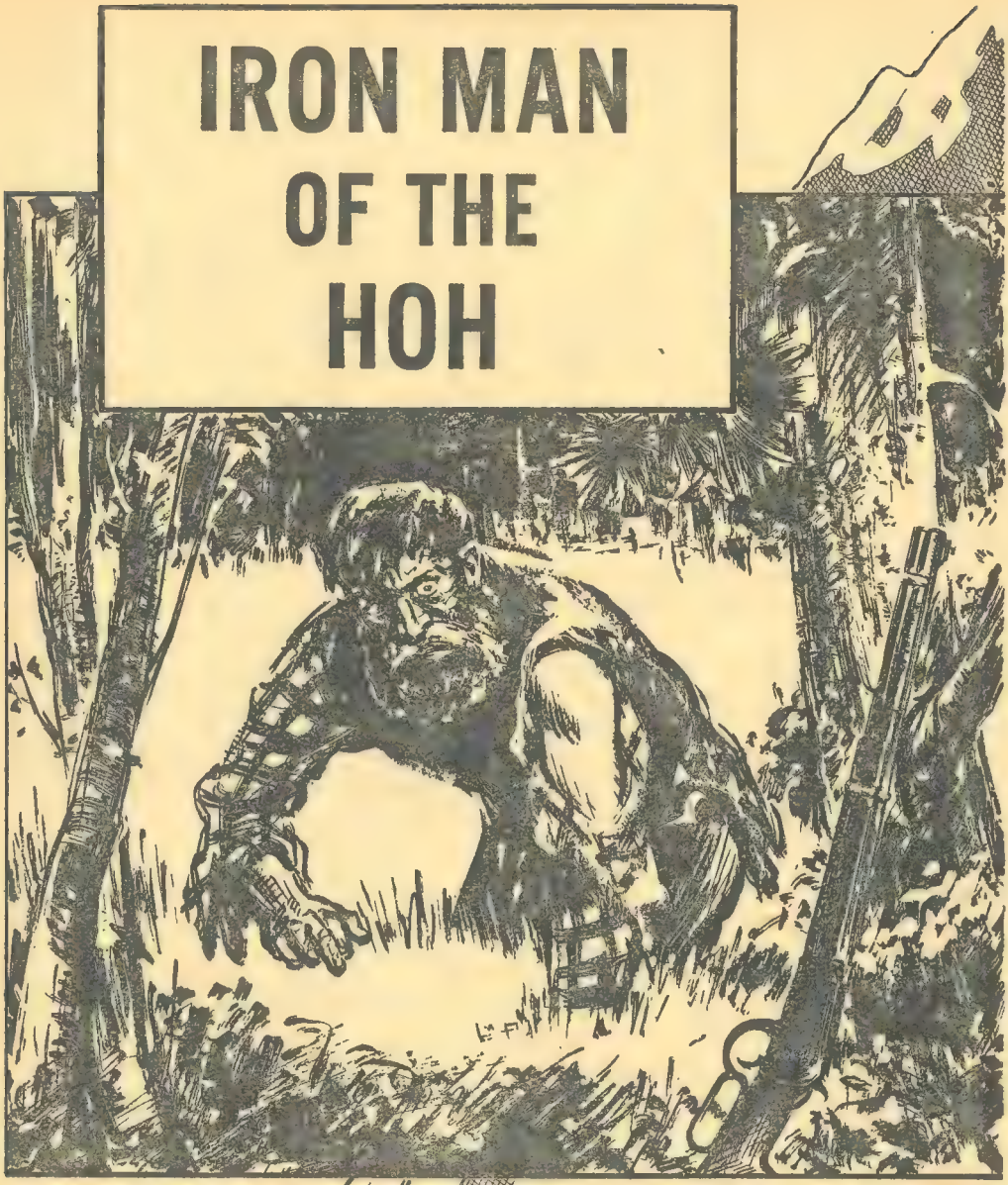
He paused and held her face up to the moon.

"No matter what the weather," he said.

THE END



IRON MAN OF THE HOH

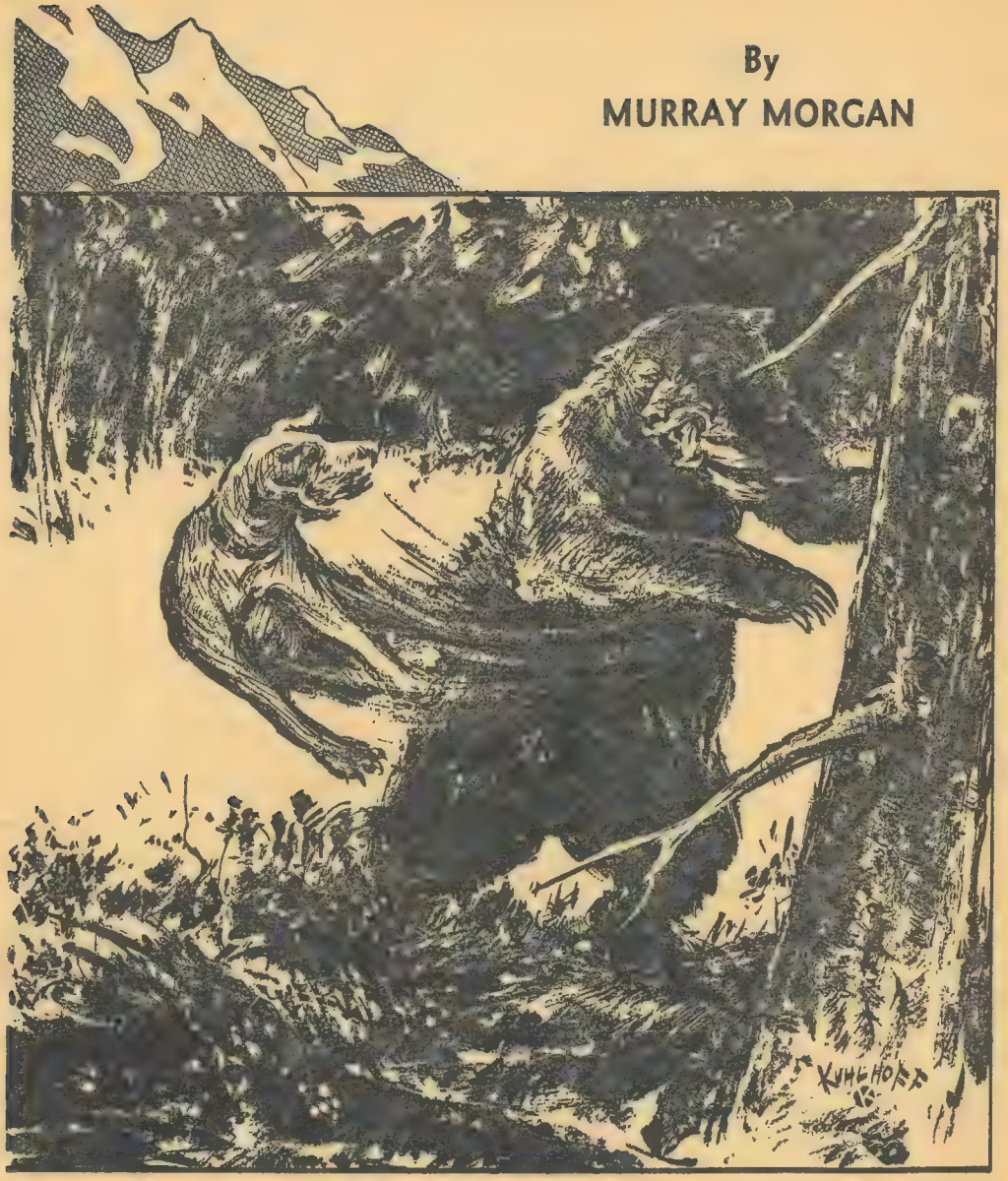


The dog was knocked thirty feet through the air by a solid swipe from the beast's great paw.

A FACT STORY

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

By
MURRAY MORGAN



WHEN John Huelsdonk, the Iron Man of the Hoh, died last October at the age of seventy-nine, nearly everyone who had heard of him was surprised.

Many persons who had listened to tales about the Iron Man believed he was as much a myth as Paul Bunyan. They were surprised that he had ever really lived. Others believed him long-since dead, like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone. They were astounded to learn he had lived in this century. Those, like myself, who knew he was still living, took it for granted that John Huelsdonk would live on forever, like the Douglas firs in his Pacific Northwest stamping grounds.

Huelsdonk was a legend in his own

time. When loggers gathered in the long bunkhouses, the rail-and-stool restaurants, the one-tap beer halls in the Olympic Peninsula at the extreme northwest tip of the United States, they were far less likely to mention Paul Bunyan and his blue ox than they were to talk about Huelsdonk and his cougar dogs.

Of all the Huelsdonk legends, the most frequently heard, the most loved and the most embellished, was the tale of the Iron Man and the kitchen range. It went like this:

Back around 1905 a party of Forest Service men was cutting across the Olympic Peninsula. The going was rough. The Olympic mountains are rugged peaks; their tops are snow-clad and their skirts are covered with rain forest—a cold jungle. The party worked up through the wilderness to a steep slope where only a scattering of trees clung to the tilted rock of the mountainside. They paused to rest, to look back, to wonder if ever before white men had penetrated this remote spot.

And as they rested, they were startled to hear a strange clanking in the forest below.

The rangers eyed each other a bit uneasily and fingered their guns. Then, into the clearing, trotted Huelsdonk, a kitchen stove on his back. He plodded up the mountainside and paused to say hello and to explain that he was taking the stove to a neighbor across the Peninsula on the upper Hoh River.

"But good Lord, man," protested one of the rangers, "isn't that stove awfully heavy?"

"Oh, the weight is nothing," replied Huelsdonk, shrugging stove and shoulders, "but it's sort of hard to keep my balance when that darned sack of flour in the oven shifts."

So goes the legend. John himself never admitted its truth. A few of the later versions, which had Huelsdonk carrying a stove under each arm, seem improbable to students of the period; they argue that no settler on the Peninsula could afford two stoves.

Whatever the truth concerning the tale about the sack of flour, there was undeniably an iron range in the Huelsdonk homestead in the Hoh Valley, twenty-five miles from the nearest road.

HUELSDONK was a powerful man. He could hold a fifty-pound sack of meal at arm's length without showing any strain. And when the Government was hiring men to pack hundred-pound supply sacks into remote fire lookout stations, he asked if a worker would get double pay for carrying two loads at once. The agent said yes, as long as the fool survived, which he estimated would be a hundred yards. So the Iron Man shouldered a pair of sacks and strolled off. He kept it up all winter, putting aside the extra money for his daughters' education.

R. L. Fromme, a superintendent in the Forest Service during Huelsdonk's long heyday, was even more impressed by a feat he learned of "almost first-hand." In 1916 the Service completed a horse trail connecting the head of the Sol-duk drainage area on the Puget Sound side of the Peninsula with the upper Hoh River on the Pacific side. From the summit the trail dropped 2500 feet; it was cut between two rock slides less than a hundred feet apart. In two miles there were 107 switchbacks and the grade was so steep, the rangers complained, that on the turns a man dipped sand into his near ear.

Before completion of this trail, John and his 300-pound wife had taken the round-about coastal trails whenever they went to Port Angeles, nearest "big city" on Puget Sound. This time they tried the trail. Going up was bad enough for the Iron Lady, but coming down the steep grade proved too much for her legs. She sat down and tried to shoot-the-chute along the switchbacks. This was too slow for John, who hoisted her onto his back and ran down the two mile trail.

One of Huelsdonk's four daughters recalls that whenever the family was on a hike and came to a river, John would take a girl under each arm and another on his back and wade across. He performed this ferry service long after the girls had expanded into well-formed but weighty women.

Because of his strength, Huelsdonk was thought of as a giant. Even people who had seen him spoke of him as "towering" and "huge." He was big but no Bunyan. He stood under six feet and weighed a few pounds under two hundred. He had wide shoulders, a slab of a chest, the waist of a

yellow-jacket, and a spade beard. When he came to town, which was seldom, football coaches drooled and fight managers moaned. He might have been an All American fullback or, perhaps, a heavyweight champion. But the only sport that interested him was hunting.

Huelsdonk hunted for meat and he hunted for money. He killed deer to add to the supplies in his smokehouse, and he killed cougar to add the $50 bounty to his bank account. The money he made killing the big cats helped put his girls through college. If not the greatest cougar hunter who ever lived, he was a serious contender for that title.

The cougar, known in other parts of the country as puma, mountain lion, panther or catamount, is the largest and toughest of American wild cats. Also the noisiest. The scream of a ten-foot cougar is enough to keep a brave man indoors.

The Iron Man killed his first big cat around 1890 and his last in 1945. Sometime between those years he lost count of the total. In his obituaries, newspaper estimates of his cougar kill ranged from seventy-five to four hundred.

Hunting cougar is no sport for sissies. The big beasts are quite capable of killing a man, and so is the wild country through which they must be hunted. The best season for stalking cougar is winter, when deep snow forces them down from the high mountains and when their tracks are more easily followed. But the Olympic Peninsula, rugged enough in summer, is appalling in winter. The twenty-foot deep tangle of undergrowth is shrouded with snow, and the rocky slopes are sheathed with ice. Huelsdonk loved winter hunting.

"His happiest moments were roaming the woods with dogs and gun and matching his skill with wily cougar or bobcats," his daughter, Lena, told me some years ago. "Sometimes he ran out of food, but regular meals did not concern him much. The older he grew, the less he demanded of ease and comfort. If the ground was too wet and he had no shelter, he was perfectly capable of roosting on a log beside his fire, like an owl, sleeping sitting up, entirely unsupported. He would camp for weeks in the snow of high Olympic ridges, trapping marten and cougar with nothing except a six-foot square of light canvas for shelter and bedding."

THERE is no closed season on cougar. They are predators and can be killed at any time. Huelsdonk made his greatest kill early in the fall of 1936, when he was sixty-nine years old. He was walking along a trail on some routine household mission when he noticed a large number of flies. Instinct—or experience—told him that they were feeding on a partly-eaten cougar kill. He hurried back to his ranch, got his gun and cougar-dog, and started the hunt. A few hours later, the dog treed Big Foot, a twelve-foot long cat that had been raiding the ranches of the Hoh Valley for several years. Big Foot was so tough it took twenty slugs from the Iron Man's 30-30 carbine to kill him.

Cougars are dangerous as long as they breathe, and they keep breathing a remarkably long time. It is seldom that a single shot stops them. This makes hunting them risky at best, and shooting them by candlelight is not the best way. Yet it is sometimes done. When the dogs tree a big cat at night, the hunters will occassionally pot him by artificial light.

Huelsdonk and a hunting companion, Pete Brandeburry, decided one moonless night to make an immediate kill of a cougar their dogs had run up a high stump on a mountainside. Pete lit a candle and Huelsdonk fired at the snarling cat. The cougar fell, wounded but full of fight. Pete dropped the candle. The cat sprang toward Huelsdonk, who leaped out of the way, fell, dropped his gun and rolled down the mountainside fifty feet before piling up against a log. The two dogs attacked the cougar; all three tumbled down the slope and landed against Huelsdonk and the log. While Pete fumbled with matches, trying to light the candle, the Iron Man lay as quietly as possible under the pile. Pete finally achieved illumination, and his next shot killed the cougar. John crawled out from under, only slightly scratched.

Bears caused the Iron Man more grief than cougars. In the fall of 1933 one almost ended his career. Huelsdonk was on fire patrol on the Snahappish Trail when his cougar dog, Tom, scared up a large and unhappy bear. The dog rushed the bear and was knocked thirty feet through the air by a solid swipe from the beast's great paw.

Huelsdonk ran for his rifle, but the bear ran faster. It knocked him flat, hugged him with its front paws and clawed his legs with its hind paws. Locked together, man and beast rolled into a gulley. Huelsdonk countered the bear hug with a stranglehold, but the animal outweighed him a thousand pounds and had longer, sharper claws.

The Iron Man was being crushed and clawed to death when his dog staggered to his feet and in spite of several crushed ribs returned to the attack. Tom diverted the bear long enough for Huelsdonk to break free and crawl to his gun. One shot killed the bear. Then Huelsdonk carried his dog seventeen miles over mountain trails to his home. It took Mrs. Huelsdonk two days to persuade her husband to walk on into Forks to see a doctor. At the hospital they hemstitched Huelsdonk with thirty-two stitches and put him to bed for three weeks, his only confinement until his final illness.

The Iron Man had other memorable brushes with bears. Once, when hunting with Pete, they encountered a bear in logged off land. John froze to give Pete, who was nearer, the shot. But the bear detected the hunter and ran for a tree. Huelsdonk had frozen so well that the bear tried to climb him. He held the bear off with his gun stock until Pete put in the finishing shot.

On another trip, Pete and John killed a huge bear as it was crawling out of a hole in a dead tree. The bear wedged in the hole. Pete crawled in a lower cavity to get under the carcass and push. John climbed up outside to pull. They sweated and tugged and dug. Pete lit a match to see how the work was progressing. The rotten wood and the bear's bedding exploded into flame. Pete clawed his way straight through the side of the tree to escape. He emerged, according to Huelsdonk, "as smoked as a siwash salmon," but in good enough shape to help the Iron Man haul the roasted bear home.

HUELSDONK would not carry a loaded gun in the woods, and he was bitter about fools who did. The only time he ever expressed physical fear was when he knew there were inexperienced hunters in the woods. His fears were shared by other settlers on the Peninsula. When, in 1937, open season was declared on elk, which had been protected for a quarter of a century and were so numerous that they had become a public nuisance, many old-timers evacuated the area for the duration of the hostilities. A few, who were strapped for ready cash, drove their cows into the woods, climbed trees, and waited for the inevitable. After the cows were shot, the settlers climbed down and collected payment from the city folk. Usually they were able to keep the beef, too, for few hunters brought in pack animals to carry out their kills.

One old-timer, weary of chasing bull elk from his cornfield during the years they were protected, welcomed the chance to chase them with a gun instead of a broomstick. He disregarded his neighbors' advice to keep under cover while the city hunters were at large. He outfitted himself in technicolor haberdashery—red hat, red coat, red pants, red shoes. He even painted red stripes on his pack-donkey. To avoid danger he went deep into the woods a day before the season opened. And he survived the start of hunting by only a few hours.

When some hunter found him, shot through his red hat, they loaded his crimson-coated body onto his red-striped donkey and started to bring him out. Somebody shot the donkey.

Probably the greatest tribute to Huelsdonk's woodsmanship is that he survived nine successive elk seasons, unscathed though not unscared.

Huelsdonk did not consider himself a good shot. For one thing, his guns were seldom in first class shape. He took good care of them, but it rains 150 inches a year in the Hoh Valley and while hunting he could not always keep them dry. He seldom bought a new gun until bullets from the old one struck sideways.

Olympic legend made the Iron Man a male Annie Oakley, a deep-woods David, and a streamlined William Tell, all rolled into one. There appears to be no documentation of the stories about his killing bears and cougars with slingshots. But one of his daughters tells the following tale:

"John and a group of visitors, woodsmen all, were trying out their guns. My mother said, 'Pa, there's a hawk up in that

tree. While you're shooting, why don't you scare him away?'

"The hawk was up in the tip-top of a tall spruce, so far away he look no bigger than a robust blue fly. He was so far off that the first sight would completely cover him and hide him.

"Pa said, 'Well, why not shoot him?' Everybody laughed, so Pa kept the joke going by saying, 'I'll hit him right in the eye.'

"So he took aim and fired and the hawk dropped. The men went to pick him up. And the hawk had been shot in the eye. Pa was far more astonished than anyone else, but you could never convince those men that it was just a million to one accident."

Huelsdonk was more than a hunter. He was a settler and a sober citizen, a leader as well as a legend. He was born in Germany in 1867, but was of Dutch extraction. Family tradition is that the name was originally von Huelsdonk, which can be translated "from the deep, dark forest."

John had six years of schooling. But when he was twelve his family was uprooted by Bismarck's persecution of liberals. They fled to Iowa and the Iron Man's formal education was at an end. For several years he worked on an Iowa farm, but when he was twenty-one, young Huelsdonk abandoned the open fields and went west to Washington State. The first job offered him was on a surveying party and he immediately distinguished himself by getting lost inside the Seattle city limits.

He loved the woods and he learned fast. Within a year the forest had few mysteries for him. In 1890 he went with a survey party through the wilderness of the almost unsettled Olympic Peninsula. The rain forest fascinated him. That winter he returned to the Peninsula alone to hunt a homestead.

He tumbled into a stream and lost all his provisions and equipment, except for a water-soaked sack of flour he retrieved a mile downstream from the scene of the accident. Alone, without matches or blankets, he lived for a week on raw dough that he mixed in the top of the flour sack. Finally he located land he liked, in the Hoh River Valley, twenty-five extremely rugged miles from the ten-house settlement of Forks.

AFTER spending a year building a cabin, John went east in 1892 and married his German-born adopted sister, Dora Wolff. Their honeymoon trip was hardly languorous: by train to Seattle, lumber-schooner to the mouth of the Chehalis River, and then a sixty-mile hike over a sketchy trail to the Hoh. Huelsdonk carried his wife's trunk all the way. Three times they borrowed canoes from the Indians to cross rivers.

Dora's first trip "outside" came sixteen years later, in 1908—six years after the birth of her fourth daughter.

During the Nineties, the Huelsdonks were far from lonely. Relatives came west until they almost overflowed the Peninsula.

John's grandfather, his father and mother, and a dozen brothers, sisters and cousins arrived to carve out stump ranches on nearby homesteads.

Comforts were few. Once when Mrs. Huelsdonk obtained some sage to flavor a hen for the schoolteacher's Christmas dinner, John found the taste so unfamiliar that he whispered to his wife, "Ma, cook another hen quick. I think this one et skunk."

At first the Iron Man specialized in ranching rather than hunting. He raised cattle, chickens, even tobacco. But in 1909, as part of the first Roosevelt's land conservation program, the Government established a great timber reserve in the western Olympics. This preserved stands of spruce and fir for later generations. But putting the region in cold storage froze out most of the homesteaders. Only a half-dozen families managed to stick to their ranches.

Huelsdonk stuck to his stumps.

A supremely self-reliant individual, John knew he could live off the fat of the Olympic land. He had shelter and he could always raise and hunt enough food. But he had little marketable produce—and he had a family. Acutely aware of his own abbreviated education, he wanted his daughters to go to college. It was to finance educations for Elizabeth, Marie, Dora and Lena that he became a one-man pack-train and, later, took to hunting. Cougars were his cash crop.

Time brought the world almost to his remote door. In 1943, to help get spruce

needed in making light bombers, the Government built a bridge across the Hoh. Huelsdonk, then seventy-six, helped make the survey for the bridge site.

He welcomed company. He was no hermit. Hunters received a pioneer welcome when they stopped by Huelsdonk's hand-carved cedar palace on the Hoh. Before the bridge was built, the Iron Man had fastened a horn to a tree across the river. All a passing hunter had to do to get a free ferry trip was blow on it. Huelsdonk, or one of the girls, would paddle over after him.

The year before his death, the Iron Man entertained a party of young hunters from California. They had shot an elk across a ridge a few miles from Huelsdonk's homestead, and they came to ask advice on the best way to pack it out. Huelsdonk offered to help. One of the young men remarked that they did not want to inconvenience so old a man. Huelsdonk good-naturedly said that he thought he was strong enough to go along and give them some advice. They led him back to the scene of their kill, stopping often to let him rest. Then, after showing the hunters how to quarter the elk, he picked up the heaviest piece and started straight over the ridge with it. The young men tried to follow but soon gave up.

Huelsdonk had steaks frying by the time the weary Californians staggered in along the easier trail.

A year later he was dead, and, in the words of one newspaper, "buried in a country made richer by his deeds and legends."

But a man who was a legend in his own time can never really die. He lives on as the central figure in countless sagas of the rain forest, tales of timber cruising, cougar hunting, stump ranching, fire fighting. He was the Last of the Pioneers, the symbol of what the people of the Pacific Northwest like to think their forefathers were: mighty hunter, crafty woodsman, braver than a she-bear in the spring.

As one logger indignantly remarked when he saw Huelsdonk referred to as a second Paul Bunyan, "What did that guy Bunyan ever do that the Iron Man couldn't do better?"

ADVENTURE

By Lowe W. Wren

No watchman rounds Adventure with his stick.
It does not come and go six days a week.

Adventure serves. But not by box or bale.
It is not trapped and tamed like iron or steel.
It wears an apron, yet allows no clock
To time or check its soul. It bears exchange,
Yet is not cut and wrapped like weights of meat
Where men trade out their lives six days a week.

Adventure serves the open door, the wide,
The deep. It feels the range of star-dust and
Of suns; it leads the airplane down the sky;
And is not loath to climb where Nature sits
Graving slow rock on bleak and silent hills.

Adventure lives beyond dull lanes and gates.
No man can herd it with his little stick.

(Continued from page 6)

Krueger (that's why you never heard of him) and moved on to GHQ to do Civil Information work with Japanese press and radio.

Finally got out summer of '46.

DAN CUSHMAN, whose "The Cask of Khabar" appears on page 44 this issue, writes, on joining our Writers' Brigade for the first time—

It was in Butte, Montana. I had just spoken before a service club on the subject of the African Katanga. One of the members paused to congratulate me in a southpaw manner.

Shaking hands he said, "It's sure hell living in a backward country like the U.S.A."

Like other travelers before and since, I had returned itching to debunk the Tarzan legend and had gone too far.

Africa is still the Dark Continent, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I'm not referring to the lack of sunlight in her jungles, but to the dark chambers of her superstitious mind.

A visitor arrives expecting only waving palms and bare-breasted maidens *à la National Geographic*, and instead looks at dull bush country with occasional depot stops as his railroad coach rattles north from Bulawayo. He takes his look at Vic Falls, and winds up the long journey, perhaps, on the veranda of the Metropole Hotel in sparkling Elizabethville, drinking sundowners, as Herr Raufer says in my story, "mit ice."

But if he hangs around a while he'll discover that the continent is very large, and European "improvement" is a pretty narrow façade on each side of the *chemin de fer*. The natives he sees passing on L'Avenue de L'Etoile, recently unbenighted by the Union Miniére and handed the feed screw of an Ingersall Rand 185-pound drifter drill in place of his traditional spear of assagai wood, might still surprise him by spending his nights stamping to the rhythm of the same sorcerer's dance that occupied his ancestors at the time of Solomon.

My apologies to the good Rotarians of the city of Butte.

The three of us who made up the geological field crew were camped in a rondevel of Kimberley brick along the Rhodesia copper zone which extends from the Roan Antelope to Elizabethville. It was bush country, flat as North Dakota and hotter than a Pullman porter with his own dice.

There was myself, an Afrikander Kid named Kampen, and a German Ph.D. named Schmidt.

Outcrops were few in those broad, disseminated copper lodes, or "reefs" as the English persist in calling them. They're big and low-grade, and the only way of prospecting them is by means of a core drill.

After the ground was surface mapped and the drills got to turning, all Doc Schmidt had to do was sit around, plot assays, and glance at core samples. This took at least two hours a week, and the rest of his time he spent in his canvas chair wishing he had a few chunks of Elizabethville ice to put in his sundowners. And because Doc was a considerate superior, Kampen and I spent our time keeping him company.

We had three black "boys" to do the work that one part-time handyman could have performed back in the States. The one who figures in this account was named Schnapps. Doc's idea.

It was Schnapps' duty to care for the yard. As the "yard" consisted of baked clay dirt and nothing else, his only task was to water Doc's pet frangipani bush which stood in a half petrol barrel by the front door. The petrol barrel kept away termites, the Katanga's king of animals.

One morning Schnapps came dragging out of the bush looking as though he'd spent the night with an inhospitable leopard.

Questioned by Doc, he reluctantly recounted a strange story.

He had been at the spirit house down at the kraal communing with the shades of some departed ancestors with the help of a two-toned tree-trunk drum, some iron balls in a calabash, and the incantations of a witch-doctor. Suddenly a sorcerer who had assumed a form that was half man and half beast entered the hut, demanding Schnapps' soul that he might devour it. But Schnapps, that upright tender of frangipani bushes, and moreover a convert to the Church of England, refused.

The man-beast thereupon fell on him with fang and claw, and would undoubtedly have killed him had not Schnapps long before foreseen such an emergency and inserted a bit of mopani wood beneath one of his tribal welts. The wood warded off the evil spirit just in time.

Doc and I, of course, had a pretty good laugh about Schnapps' man-beast, but Kampen, the Afrikander, took a different attitude. He told about a farmer down in south Rhodesia who hunted a lot and finally took to running with the beasts, assuming a coat of tawny hair and fangs, and eventually cohabiting with a lioness and fathering a litter of the devil only knew what.

Kampen was a level-headed kid who always carried his assay percentages out to two decimals, so after he was through we looked at Schnapps' story with more respect.

That night, for want of better entertainment, we went down to the witch doctor's hut for a séance.

Witch doctors are highly reluctant to show their wares to a casual "explorer" I have heard, and to these gentlemen I wish to bequeath a potent charm, guaranteed to make any witch-doctor turn handsprings. The charm consists of a piece of paper bearing the imprint of the Bank of England to the extent of a pound sterling.

It developed that Doc, our leader, had to make an additional sacrifice. A cockerel was brought to him for that purpose, and he was instructed to twist off its head and sprinkle blood on the ground. The deed accomplished,

he asked to see the man-beast, but this was like mentioning pork inside a Mohammedan mosque. The witch-doctor, a thin-faced fellow with Arab blood, looked positively frightened.

The man-beast, he assured us in basic French, was a sorcerer, hence the witch-doctor's greatest enemy. However, if the *Bwana* would like to ask a question of the M'bonshi spirits . . .

Doc decided he had a question, but the witch-doctor stopped him from repeating it aloud. Doc was merely to *think* the question.

We were led to an inner hut filled with the stink of grease lamps, dried buzzard wings, mongoose tails, warthog bladders and all the other offal used as gri-gri charms.

The witch-doctor sat crosslegged on a woven-palm mat with an ancient calabash between his knees. In the calabash were several iron balls.

He signalled for Doc to take one in his hand. Then he rolled his eyes back in his skull and there was a long wait while drums beat outside.

Suddenly Doc stiffened and looked around. I wondered what was wrong with him. He said something in German I didn't understand.

"What?" I asked.

"Didn't you notice that perfume?"

The only perfume I noticed was rotten gri-gris.

"It was strange," he said. "There was a breath of cool air, and afterward a perfume just like roses."

The witch-doctor came around but he wouldn't answer questions. His soul, theoretically, was in the land of M'bonshi.

Afterward it developed that Doc had been asking whether he would get a communication from any of his people, and the rose was his wife's.

He couldn't sleep that night, and next morning he got in the vanette and ran over to the post and telegraph. There he found a wire from his wife. She had unexpectedly arrived down in L.M. and was waiting for him to instruct her to proceed.

Elsewhere in this issue I have a story, and in it there is something about one man's soul, on death, transferring itself to the body of another, whereupon the living grows to resemble the dead. Don't laugh it off too readily, brother. It's still the Dark Continent.

WE THOUGHT you'd be interested, as we were, in the following correspondence about E. Hoffmann Price's novelette "Datu's Dividend" which we printed in our January issue. First, a letter addressed to this department—

It has been with a great deal of pleasure and interest that I've read E. Hoffmann Price's stories of rubber planting in Mindanao. It might be of interest to him to learn that my battalion headquarters was set up in the selfsame rubber plantation he speaks of at Kabakan. They were severely damaged by 24th Division artillery fire in routing the Japs out after a one day stand. Most of the trees suffered shrapnel cuts and limbs came tumbling down with a great tearing noise whenever a fairly moderate wind was blowing, causing much concern for the safety of tents and unhelmeted noggins.

The plantation was in the throes of rehabilitation under a 2nd Lt. in the CIC using native labor when I left it in June of '45 for Del Monte, with rather dim official hopes for its future productivity in any quantities. The Japs had overdrained the trees severely.

I'd like to question Price's basis for his main character's prodigious bout with malaria after being deprived of his atabrine ration for only a few days, in his story "Datu's Dividend". The official Medical Department statement is that in the majority of cases, except cerebral malaria, 30 days usually passes before any noticeable chills and fever take place after a discontinuance of suppressive treatment with atabrine. I have found this an absolute truth in my own tertian malaria, and with over 25 cases in my battalion while in the Southwest Pacific Area, also this is true in most Army hospital case histories.

Nevertheless I'd like to see many more stories of Mindanao, by Price. He's authentic and has been around. He might be interested in knowing I met and worked as a staff officer for both Colonel Bowler of the 106th Philippine Army Division and Colonel Fertig of almost legendary fame at Dansalan and Illigan. My battalion had the job of security of the Sayre Highway, Padada Airdrome at Digos, and the Pulangi River crossings at Ft. Pikit and Kabakan. So much traffic moved over the Sayre Highway that it was finally declared impassable between Damulog and Maramag and much equipment had to be abandoned because it sank almost out of sight in the mud.

Yours Truly,

—W. W. Housley, Jr.
295 Covina Ave.,
Long Beach 3, Calif.

We forwarded Mr. Housley's letter along to Author Price who promptly answered and sent us the following carbon of his reply—

Dear Mr. Housley:—

I am grateful indeed for the good words you speak regarding "Datu's Dividend." Coming from one who was not only in the Islands, but actually at and around Kabakan, such comment is certainly appreciated. I served in the islands many years ago, before most of today's army had been born; so it was gratifying to learn that, in the main, my memory hadn't played too many tricks.

Now, you wish to question my basis for Pete Barstow's tremendous bout with malaria. In the face of your experience, I prefer not to say a word of justification or argument. I

have not spent an hour, or even a minute, digging into medical texts in an attempt to find some hair-line case which might seem to offer me a valid loophole. If I find any anomalous case which I could offer in evidence, I'd not be inclined to do so, and for this reason: that to introduce a far-fetched, albeit authentic exception to what you state as a well-established general principle would be unethical fiction writing, except if the rare instance had been tagged, in the text, as a rarity, and a peculiar curse, as it were, which aggravated this certain man's malaria. I prefer frankly to plead guilty of a boner; confess that the inferences I drew from a general picture of malaria were incorrect; that I did not go into the matter carefully enough. There was a good deal of malaria in the Sacramento Valley when I lived there in 1909, but it never touched me. I've never taken atabrine, nor quinine—except quinine and whiskey, for a cold. Even if you were a less generous critic, I'd still prefer to plead guilty rather than quibble all over the place. And this goes for the editor, too, who is a tough cookie on the authenticity business.

A few weeks ago, I sent in another Pete Barstow yarn; if it gets into print, I hope you'll find it free of boners. Once more, thank you for the corrections, and your kind interest.

Sincerely yours,

—E. Hoffmann Price

Then this, from another reader who is equally familiar with the part of the world in which the story was set and seems to know what's going on there currently—

Dear Mr. Price:—

After reading your story "Datu's Dividend" I decided to write to you and give you a little information on the Hukbalahap, which it seemed you did not know. I realize that the story was a fictional setup but the buildup that you placed against the Huks is such that it doesn't set right with me.

In order to show that I know of what I speak, I shall give a little of my personal history.

As a member of Company C, 803 Engineer Battalion I was taken prisoner by the Japanese on Bataan Peninsula on 9 April 1942. After 10 days on the Death March I escaped.

The place of my escape was at the town of Guagua which is about 6 miles north of the town of Luboa in Pampanga Province, Luzon.

Filipinos in the area gave me food, medicine and shelter until the latter part of October 1942 when I joined the Hukbalahap as a member of their fighting forces.

From the latter part of October 1942 until 2 February 1945 I remained with the Hukbalahaps. In August 1944 I attained my highest point of advancement which was the equivalent of Major in the U. S. Army. I was at that time commissioned as Comrade Robinett, Commanding Officer of the 4th Military District, 7th Regimental Command, 2nd Division.

My Regimental Commander was *Alijandro Poblete*, alias Jose Banal and my Division Commander was Luis Taruc, alias Juan dela Cruz.

Now one thing to be made clear is the fact that I am not a Communist and I do not believe in a Communistic government.

Strange as it may seem the following is a correct account of the Hukbalahap.

Hukbalahap is derived from the Tagalog words, "Hukbu Ng Bayan Laban Sa Hapones." A literal translation would be "The people united to fight the Japanese".

In reality Hukbalahap is the second name that was given to the organization.

The original name of the organization was "Vanali" which was derived from the words "Vanguard of National Liberation". It is this name that I'll use in referring to the organization hereafter.

The "Vanali" was organized in 1938 as the fighting arm of the Socialist Party or the Partido Socialista as it is known throughout the islands. The duties of the "Vanali" were to strengthen the prestige and power of the Socialist Party thru the use of force.

Pedro Abad Santos who was at that time (1938) leader of the Socialist Party was also leader of the "Vanali."

In 1942 Luis Taruc assumed control of the entire Socialist organization because of illness on the part of Abad Santos. The "Vanali" under the direction of Luis Taruc built an underground government in Central Luzon patterned after that of Soviet Russia. Up until December 1942 the "Vanali" stayed together in one huge armed band. At that time they numbered about 800 men all heavily armed.

On December 2nd, 3rd, and 4th 1942 they were involved in a fight with the Japanese which cost them better than 80 men including 5 American soldiers who had joined their ranks so as to carry on the fight which had ceased with the surrender of Bataan and Corregidor.

After this one fight it was decided that it would be better if the organization was split up into numerous squadrons which would operate in given areas for the purpose of hindering the Japanese as much as possible and would further the plans and purposes of the Socialist Party.

Pampanga Province was and still is the dominant Socialist area in the Philippines and is therefore the hub for the wheel of Socialism in the islands.

The province was divided into six sections which were known as military districts and each squadron was assigned a certain district.

The entire province as a whole and including small sections of Bataan, Zambales, Tarlac, and Bulacan Provinces were organized into the 7th Regimental Command of the 2nd Division.

In the beginning all the "Vanali" activities were centered in the Macabebe, Masantol, Minalin areas and also in the vicinity of the towns of Arayat, Mexico, and Candaba.

In the early part of 1943 I personally aided in setting up the "Vanali" organization as it is today.

The squadrons were based on a 120 man strength, which was divided into two platoons of 60 men each. Each platoon was in turn divided into four squads of 15 men each.

Commanding the squadron was the squadron commander whose rank was the equivalent of that of a captain.

Acting as liaison between the squadron C.O. and the district C.O. was a man known as the political director. His duty was to relay orders from the district headquarters to the squadron C.O.; his other duties were to keep the members of the squadron and the civil populace informed of all Socialistic propaganda which would keep everyone believing that the Vanali was fighting for a just cause.

Other units of the Vanali were the Ordnance Division which was responsible for the firearms which were in use.

The Division of Intelligence which was responsible for the assassination or kidnap and execution of all Pro-Jap Filipinos or of anyone who tried to work against the Vanali or its military aims. Many instances arose in which various guerrilla units which disliked the Vanali would actively aid the pro-Jap constabulary in attempts to wipe out the Vanali. In such cases those aiding the constabulary were treated as pro-Jap and were executed if captured.

Many of these units which aided the Japanese controlled constabulary were later given official recognition by the U. S. Army upon its return to the Philippines.

Another unit was the Provision Division. It was their duty to obtain and stock-pile needed food, clothing and medicines. They were also responsible for the procuring of medical care for anyone wounded in combat.

The last and smallest unit was the Organizing Division, whose duty it was to see that the guerrilla-controlled area was kept expanding. They moved from village to village talking to and gaining the sympathy of the people.

Only in the Intelligence Division, the Provision Division and in the Organizing Division were women used. All women who went with the guerrillas did so of their own free will. At no time was disrespect to a woman tolerated and from the latest reports that I have received from the Islands those rules haven't been changed any. It was an automatic death sentence for anyone to kiss a girl (anyone who belonged to the guerrillas) without being married to her. This law was strictly adhered to as it was necessary to keep the best name possible in order to hold the regard of the people. Therefore the possible violation of a woman is completely out of place.

The Provision Division, as were the other units, was under the direct command of the Military District C.O. and never did I see anything taken for personal gain.

The units of the Fourth Military District were in combat a total of 287 times. We suffered a loss of nearly 500 men and inflicted upon the Japanese an estimated casualty list of 3500 men not counting numerous trucks which were destroyed nor the large amounts of arms and ammunition captured.

Basically the organization is Communist.

Sincerely Yours,

—Sgt. Blair Robinett
P. O. Box 301
Oakland, Md.

Author Price replies, in turn to Sergeant Robinett, thuswise—

Dear Mr. Robinett:—

Thank you for your long and interesting letter on the Huks. You are right: there was plenty that I did not know about the Huks, not having been in the Islands for a good many years.

Realizing that the best journalistic reporting would be biased or incomplete, I deliberately created a set-up wherein racketeers, comparable to our domestic brand, "organized" farmers in Mindanao; I deliberately hedged my position in order to avoid inadvertently maligning the actual Huks of Luzon, the Luis Taruc group. After reiterating my sincere appreciation of your narrative, I beg leave to refer to my notes in the *Camp-Fire* section, wherein I quote Major C. S. Staples, U.S.A. retired. There may not be any pseudo-Huks or Quasi-Huks, but there could be. Consider the "Black Popes" of Samar (circa 1910), "saviours" who looted and pillaged indiscriminately. Consider Datu Ali, Jikiri, and other "patriots" who raised hell in Mindanao, in the days before and after the classic battle of Bud Bagsak; and Bud Dajo was no picnic either. If I gave you the impression of damning the Hukbalahaps of Luzon, as a group, I am sorry; just as I'd regret it if, in damning Petrillo, Bioff, and Lewis, I'd give you the impression that I condemned Labor, instead of merely the dictators who are using Labor as an implement.

As to the abductions: I am neither rash nor pig-headed enough to argue in the face of your unequivocal statement of Huk policy on the treatment of women. That phase, as well as details of armament in my skirmish, derived literally from news clippings. A racketeering organization, trading on the Huk name, need not and probably would not observe Huk ethics. For instance, at a local cannery, during the war, organizers were pawing and mauling women workers who did not wish to join the union; doubtless violence was against union rules, but it existed. I didn't get this from a news clipping, but from the wife of a well-to-do business man. She and others of her kind had patriotically volunteered to work at the food processing plant —but quit after the first mauling.

In view of your unit's splendid battle record, I can readily see how my story called for your statement. I hope that I have made my position clear, and I regret that I did not make it even more clear, in the text of my story. Thank you again.

—E. Hoffmann Price

And back comes Robinett with the following—

Dear Mr. Price:—

Am writing to you in answer of your letter of 6 March 1947. Your letter proved of the highest interest and I believed it explained your reasons for writing the story as you did.

I realize that the story was purely fictional and as such it could have been written to include any organization anywhere; regardless of the fact as to whether the story backed the organization or whether it opposed it. Either way would have made no difference basically.

Had the story been published as a true narrative then the situation would have taken on a different aspect.

I primarily meant for my letter to be informative rather than critical. As a fictionalized story I considered it excellent.

You made mention of the fact of racketeers in the Hukbu. This type of person is to be found in any organization, whether it be the Republican Party, The C.I.O. or the U. S. Army.

Anytime you get a large organization, composed of a large number of personnel from a wide area, then you can look and find those few who are interested only in personal aggrandizement.

In 1942 some Japanese enlisted men raped a Filipino girl who was at that time about 22 years of age. What her true name was I don't know.

Along toward the end of 1942 she joined the guerrilla movement and took the alias of Comrade Culala. Because she turned out to be an excellent fighter who wasn't afraid of the devil himself she was promoted to Squadron Commander, Commanding Sq. #81.

From Sq. C.O. she was promoted to Commanding Officer of the 3rd Military District; 7th Regimental Command and established her Headquarters at the town of Candaba in Pampanga Province.

It was the ruling at this time that all jewelry and money taken from anyone who was captured and executed was to be turned over to regimental headquarters and used for the good of the organization.

Comrade Culala realized though that the war wouldn't last forever, so whenever any money or valuables reached her she bought up gold with the money and kept both the gold and the valuables. It was her idea that with the end of the war she could buy land with the gold and the jewelry and in that way she would have a steady income for life.

Reports started coming in as to what Comrade Culala was doing and so in August 1944 I received orders from Comrade Jose Banal, Regimental Commander, to investigate the situation and to take appropriate action.

I turned the orders over to my wife who was at that time Chief of the Division of Intelligence in my District.

My wife and two of the male members of the D. I. started the investigation and in about 3 weeks they were back at my Headquarters with Comrade Culala, her Chief of D.I. and her hoard of jewelry and gold on which I placed an estimate of 50,000 to 60,000 pesos (pre-war value).

Comrade Culala and her Chief of D.I. were tried before a general court-martial; found guilty of using the guerrilla movement for personal aggrandizement and executed.

I don't deny the abduction of women, but where women were abducted it was for the sole purpose of executing them for collaborating with the Japanese. Sufficient evidence was always obtained beforehand to insure that we were not making a mistake. At no time were any women mis-handled.

Trials were swift and executions were swifter.

In the case of male collaborationists many of them were mauled around before they were executed in order to get as much information as possible; but women, never.

I don't profess to know much about the Philippines as a whole but where the Hukbu is concerned I believe that I know more than any other American living or dead.

I believe that I am correct in saying that I am the only American to have gained the complete faith and confidence of the Hukbalahap.

If in the future you should decide to write another story in which the Hukbalahap participates and I can give you any information on the organization, I will be only too glad to do so.

Sincerely yours,

—Sgt. Blair Robinett

An extraordinary interesting sequence of letters, we felt. Don't you agree?

WOE Is Us Department:—If all you alert readers who jumped on us and Artist Hamilton Greene for putting the Golden Gate Bridge across San Francisco Bay back in the early '20's were floated, pontoon-fashion, end to end across the harbor we'd be able to walk from Berkeley to Sausalito and never get our feet wet. We're referring, of course, to Andrew A. Caffey's novelette of early air mail days, "By the Seat of Their Pants," which we printed in our March issue, and more particularly to the illustration on page 28. The artist has been properly admonished for his pictorial anachronism; we've kicked ourselves hard for not catching it before it got reproduced; and have been appropriately red-faced one and all ever since. We'll try to cross no more bridges before they're built from now on!—K.S.W.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

THE Graham-Tewksbury feud.

Query:—An article I read recently had to do with the Graham-Tewksbury feud on the Mogollon Rim. Am wondering if this range is in Arizona, New Mexico or maybe in southern Utah. Have also heard that Zane Grey wrote a book, "To The Last Man," which was based on the Graham-Tewksbury feud. Is this correct? Maybe you will think I should let sleeping dogs lie, but my father told me years ago that one of our clan (an uncle or cousin) left Kentucky and went out to that country and was never heard of again. Perhaps this isn't the same family at all. Do you know where this Graham outfit was from? And do you know if there were any Graham survivors? There's just a chance in a million that we Grahams are one and the same. Thanks for your courtesy.

—Walter Graham,
Illiapolis, Ill.

Reply by C. C. Anderson:—Wow! What a question! A letter from a Graham asking about the Graham-Tewksbury feud, and the "Pleasant Valley" war and the "Last Man" and me living right among descendants of those who fought in it, and even after nearly 60 years not being able to get anything first hand from anybody.

Well, I know quite a bit about it, so here goes: Earle R. Forrest, wrote a book about it, "Arizona's Dark and Bloody Ground," published by Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho in 1936, and it was out of print only five or six years after being published. Everyone around here owns a copy, because some ancestor or someone they revere is mentioned in it, but they don't talk about it.

When Forrest was getting material for it he found court records in Phoenix were simply not existent, but he did find some court records in St. Johns, the seat of Apache County, 90 miles from here. He used them, and as soon as the book was printed those records disappeared!

The Mogollon Rim is the northern boundary of the Tonto Basin, located almost in the center of Arizona but extended eastward from the center. The Tonto Basin is roughly over a hundred miles from east to west, and averages about half that from north to south. It is a great valley of rolling, pine covered hills, with the rim on the north rising up in the form of rim rocks or cliffs as it is a great geological fault. There is no pronounced rim on the southern part of the basin, or the east or west. Almost south, a little west, from Holbrook it is 55 miles to the rim.

Even today there is more grass in the Tonto Basin than almost anywhere else in the state. The altitude varies from 4,000 to 5,000 feet which gives it a plentiful rain—and snowfall, about 20 inches a year compared to less than 10 inches where I sit, only 50 miles away as I said. So, it was range land worth fighting over, for the land alone, and not considering the personal bitterness and factions which developed.

While the Apache Indians still roamed the basin, plentiful in game and lush and green, the Grahams and other cattlemen settled there in 1880. Now here is the question you are interested in: I doubt if they are kinsfolk of yours, although they may well have been. There are many stories as to where the Grahams came from, the most prevalent one being they were Texans, and second that they were Californians. Tom and John Graham were born on a farm near Boone, Iowa, the sons of Samuel Graham, and in the '70's went to California, but they located in Pleasant Valley in 1882. My authority for this statement is Earle R. Forrest, who knows more about the feud than any other man, in my opinion. If you would like to try to get more information I suggest you write to: Mulford Winsor, Director, Department of Library and Archives, Phoenix, Arizona, and see if he knows where Mr. Forrest is living as I think he is still alive.

You ought to get a picture of the conditions in those days. The Mormons were settling the valleys of the Little Colorado River in the 1870's. One settlement, Joseph City, is 13 miles from here. The famous, and infamous, Hashknife cattle outfit you've read so much about, was across the river from them. So on the higher ground to the north of the Tonto Basin, or Pleasant Valley, we had not only the Mormon settlements all running cattle, but the Hashknife outfit which ran as many as 60,000 head.

On the same high plateau, to the north of Pleasant Valley, but west with headquarters at Flagstaff, we had what was first an all-Mormon outfit that must have been bigger than the Hashknife, the Arizona Cattle Company, founded by John W. Young, son of

Brigham Young, whom you've no doubt heard about. Also with headquarters at Flagstaff were several brothers named Daggs, who were running sheep. Now, sheep and cattle could have been run on neighboring ranges and no trouble caused, because sheep can graze the higher ground in summer and the deserts in winter, and they eat browse and brush where cattle can eat only grass.

But with the ground crowded as it then was, and everybody trying to make as much as they could as fast as they could, and taking no thought of their posterity or whether or not they overgrazed the land, it seemed to be the sheepmen who needed more range. I think it quite true that it was the sheep men who were more guilty than the cowmen in overgrazing the land.

Anyhow, Daggs brothers, in 1886, are reported to have financed the Tewksburys with sheep which they "pushed over the Mogollon Rim."

John D. Tewksbury was the father of three sons, Edwin, John and James. He was a native of Boston and had gone to California in the gold rush of '49 and married an Indian woman, the mother of the three sons, although they denied this. They had settled around Globe in 1879 but the mother was dead and the old man remarried to an Englishwoman. Old John Tewksbury took no part in the fight and first blood is said to have been drawn by Ed Tewksbury when he fired on the foreman of the Stinson ranch and wounded him.

The war that followed lasted from 1886 to 1892 with a total of 19 known dead. Some claim as high as 50 dead, but 25 or 30 would no doubt cover it. Yes, Zane Grey's story "To The Last Man" is based on this. The Graham family was finally wiped out entirely with no survivors and no progeny. As I said old John Tewksbury didn't take part in the war and his son, James, was not killed but died of natural causes during the war. John Tewksbury was killed and Edwin was "the last man."

This country was cattle country at that time, and it's cattle country today. Holbrook is still said to be the toughest cowtown in the U. S., and as you can readily see all the cattlemen must have taken an active part in the war—it was either fight the sheep, which meant the Tewksbury and their faction—or give up their lands and homes, because sheep can sure as hell eat out and tromp out cattle range especially if not handled well.

Although the range was saved for the cattle the cowmen were wiped out and suffered the heaviest losses. It is said that the Tewksburys with their Indian blood and no compunction against firing first were better able to take care of themselves. Nevertheless, three men, Stott, Scott, and Wilson were hanged about 60 miles south of here for being on the cattlemen's "side" although they apparently were not.

There are several "real" causes given for the war. That the Tewksburys and the Grahams were old enemies from Texas, that there was a woman behind it and that rustling was the cause, and that sheep were the cause. The old enemies from Texas myth has been exploded, and it is known that before the war started the Grahams and the Tewksburys were friends, and it is *said,* rustled other peoples calves themselves and fell out over a division of the spoils.

There may have been a woman in it. A mysterious "George" Graham appeared for trial on rustling charges in St. Johns, was acquitted, and disappeared with a Tewksbury woman. It was thought that Tom and George Graham were the same person but it isn't known.

That rustling may have been more of a cause seems probable from the territorial records, as Grahams sued Tewksburys and Tewksburys sued Grahams, we know that.

One of the highlights of the war was the feat of Sheriff Commodore Owens who killed three of the Blevans brothers and wounded the fourth in the most thrilling gun battle in the southwest. The house where it occurred in Sept. 1887 is still standing, and still in use, just one block from where I sit.

That wasn't a Naval title the young sheriff had, it was his rightful baptismal name, Commodore Perry Owens, duly elected sheriff of Apache County. He was only about 5 feet 10 and weighed only about 150 pounds. He was about 30 years old with a face like a boy's. He would have been called "Pretty Boy" or "Angel Face" in a later day. He wore his blond hair in two braids, Indian style, and although he had a reputation he was so mild mannered that people suspected his courage and also the reputation he brought with him.

Commodore Owens had warrants for the Blevans boys, for cattle stealing, and looked them up on that balmy September morning. The house has two doors, one opening directly in the sheriff's face and one opening the other way but both in the front of the house. He talked first to Andy Blevans or Cooper as he was called, who, according to eye witnesses who have told me, had the drop on the sheriff. Commodore Owens shot him, not with his revolver, which he wore on his left hip, but with his Winchester which he had over his arm and fired from that position. With the sound of Owens' shot John Blevans fired from the side door and Owens shot him. Mose jumped through a window on the north side, and Owens shot him. This all happened too fast for anyone to remember much. There must have been a few seconds' breathing spell and then young Sam Houston Blevans charged across his brothers' bodies and out the door and Owens shot him.

John Blevans lived, and stood trial at St. Johns. The four were downed in less than two minutes by one of the fastest, most deadly gunmen the southwest has ever seen. He served as sheriff of Navajo County, after it was divided from Apache County, cleaned up several other nests of outlaws, and died of natural causes, with his boots off, at Seligman, Arizona in 1919.

The last of the Grahams, Tom, married his sweetheart and moved to the Salt River valley about 1891, vowing never to wear a

gun again if it meant his life. It did as he was shot from ambush in August of 1892 near his farm at Tempe, many miles from Pleasant Valley and nearly two years after he had left the scene of the feud.

He swore that Edwin Tewksbury and John Rhodes, one of their men, shot him, before he died. Rhodes was captured by an infuriated posse the same night and almost lynched. Ed Tewksbury gave himself up three days later. At Rhodes' trial Mrs. Graham, Tom's widow, would have killed Rhodes in the court room had her husband's revolver not failed because the hammer caught in the cloth she had it concealed in.

So there's a dramatic anti-climax. Because of Mrs. Graham's attempt on Rhodes' life Ed Tewksbury secured a change of venue and stood trial at Tucson, instead of Phoenix, and was acquitted. He has not been heard of since. There's your last man.

If you can't find the book mentioned in a library and want more information you can probably get it from Mulford Winsor, whom I mentioned before, and another source would be the Arizona Pioneers' Historical Society, Tucson.

I believe Forrest's book would satisfy any curiosity you may have and hope you can get hold of a copy. Hope I've helped you some.

NOT loony at all!

Query:—I am going to ask you a rather loony question.

"How do you light a fire?"

I have several books on camping, hunting, cooking, etc., good ones and full of instructions. But somehow they all fall short. You dig a hole for the bean-pot, find an old log, cut off slivers—and oh, boy, fine in a book! I belong to the prairies, always burned coal, and most all trees look alike to me in the mountains. Now, I went out with a friend to locate a stand of cedar at Creston, B.C., and we took our lunch and thermos bottles.

According to the books, if you intend to camp, say for the night, you dig a hole for the bean-pot. But it doesn't state, First clear away the snow, over a foot deep. Dig a hole. Ground frozen solid. Find an old log. There are none. Trees all frozen. Call them evergreens. Every time you touch one, down comes about a ton of snow and a few more incidentals. We didn't light a camp-fire. We tried, but it didn't work, and we were darned glad to get home and warm up at a real stove. The camp-fire reads good in a book, but a darn sight different when it's 30° below, a foot or so of snow, ground frozen, and no ideal spot like the stories tell you.

How do you do it?

—Alfred Ruffell
635 12 Street, N.
Lethbridge, Alberta
Canada

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—If I chanced to smile when I read your letter it was a sympathetic smile, for I've been right along that same path—maybe not in quite such cold weather, but with about everything else to keep a fellow from lighting a fire. Yet, with a little know-how and often a lot more perseverance, it can be done under all circumstances.

In every stand of timber you can find saplings and small stuff that have found the competition too hard and have died, but still are standing. These are generally sound, and as not being in contact with the earth, will be reasonably dry when anything lying on the ground will be sodden. There is your firewood. Within reaching distance from the ground, on the larger timber you will find branches that have died, with dry twigs to furnish the kindling. Whittle up a goodly bundle of these, keeping them under your coat if raining, or under other protection from snow. Shovel the snow away down to earth with your snowshoes, sweep it away with an evergreen bough or kick it away. If snow-laden boughs are close above, shake them with a long pole, etc., until the snow falls clear before you begin sweeping away your hearth.

Be sure you have gathered ample kindling and wood before you make a start, then pile in tepee fashion with the finer stuff inside, and apply the match. If care has been taken to see that both kindling and wood are dry, you should have a good fire in a very few minutes.

The camp outfitters offer tablets of some chemical preparation that fires at the touch of a match and will burn for some minutes. It's a point of safety to carry a few of these, or if you can't find them in the stores, make something similar for yourself by cutting Celotex, Firtex or other cellular insulating board, into inch squares and soaking these in melted paraffin until they have taken up all they can absorb. I carry a handful of these in my pack, and have never had them fail to start a fire.

The other day I showed your letter to a friend who trained in the North country with ski and mountain troops during the war, in sub-zero snow and in evergreen timber. Without hearing my solution of your problem, he advanced the same one.

Trusting this will be of some little help when next you are caught in snowy timber.

THERE ain't no sparobins!

Query:—I had an argument with a friend of mine on whether a bird can be a cross between a robin and an English sparrow or not. He says that a bird can be half English sparrow and half robin. I say there is no such thing possible. Can you tell me?

—James Marten Clingen
Marcy State Hospital
Ward 72, Marcy, N.Y.

Reply by Davis Quinn:—A bird cannot be a cross between a robin and an English sparrow. These two birds would not breed together and even if they did, there would be no offspring.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

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SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure*.

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure*.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure*.

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure*.

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure*.

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, 3225 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 8, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure*.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 918 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure*.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, care of *Adventure*.

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure*.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Ornithology: *Birds, their habits, and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling:—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESEBERG, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—COL. R. G. EMERY, U.S.A., Ret., care of *Adventure*

United States Marine Corps—MAJ. ROBERT H. RANKIN, U.S.M.C.R., care of *Adventure*.

United States Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, U.S.N., Ret., Box 74, Del Mar, Calif.

Military Aviation—O. B. MYERS, care of *Adventure*.

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGES SURDEZ, care of *Adventure*.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★**New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley, N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

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OF BLOOD AND BOOTY

By F. R. BUCKLEY

—in which Caradosso explains to his patron, Duke Pietro IV, how he chanced to come into possession of the silver bowl bearing the arms of the Valdifiori family, which he unwisely sent to His Grace upon the occasion of the birth of his third-born. And, as Caradosso relates an example of the dire results of arriving at hasty judgments in matters of this sort—and ventures to advise His Lordship against the folly of falling into such error—we are transported back to the treacherous times of the Borgias, when the cobbles of Naples and Rome ran freely with the blood of more than one braggart whose rapier was not quite as quick as his tongue.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I want to contact Stephen Kolowoski from Chicago who was on the Secretary of Navy's yacht and at the Receiving Station in Washington. Also Joe Vieditch who was on the old Reuben James 245 in 1920—and William Jennings Bryan Guest from St. Louis who was on the old battleship, the New Jersey. Would also like to find William Wischertch from the Naval Magazine in Coco Solo and Naval Air Station along with William Henry Hanna Hurst from New Orleans who was on the old Flusser 289 in 1920. Please write L. W. Fraser, CGM, USN, 16th Fleet Staff, Orange, Texas.

I am very anxious to contact my old buddy, former S/Sgt. Harry Rogers. We served with the 491st Bomb. Group H. He may be in Biloxi, Miss., or Mobile, Ala. I have been trying since October, 1945, to find him and any help you may be able to give me will be appreciated. Please write to George Paraspolo, 627 29th St., San Francisco, Calif.

For some time I have been trying to locate my father, George Franklin Watson. He was last known to be in Cleveland, Ohio. If any one has any information whatsoever about him, please write to G. F. Watson, 695 E. Utica St., Buffalo 11, N.Y.

I would like to contact Sgt. Percy Emerick who was stationed at Ford Ord, California, 1940-1942, 3rd Inf., 7th Div. Please write to ex-Sgt. R. L. Hale, 1720 East Johns, Decatur, Illinois.

Will any soldier serving in Company A, 275th Engineers Bn., 75th Division, in Holland during the first part of 1944 who knew Cpl. F/5 Thomas L. Graham or Quentin Rall please write to Mrs. J. E. Graham, Artesia, New Mexico.

I would like to locate Ed La Vergue who was on the *USS Marblehead* at the time of her historic encounter with the Japanese. Please write J. O. Jernigan, 1014 W. Eastland Ave., Nashville, Tenn.

W. G. Carter, General Delivery, Tucson, Arizona wishes to locate Charles F. Head, about 59 years old, born in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. Would also like to find Ellsworth Head, adopted by Willis family at an early age. Charles and Ellsworth had another brother, Tom, and a sister, Leah. Would much appreciate any information concerning these people.

Paul "Duke" Byrnes, 934½ Forsythe St., Toledo, Ohio would like to locate his old buddy, James "Sugar" Solyer with whom he worked in Nevada in '39. We worked together for five years with the Div. of Interior and his hometown was Germantown, Ohio. His last known whereabouts was on the U.S.S. Sands, in New York Harbor in 1940. Anyone knowing his present locality, please write to Paul "Duke" Byrnes.

Any person who was at Lamberts Point Degaussing Station, E.Y.P.S., N.O.B., Norfolk, Virginia during the period from June 1944 to July 1945 for any length of time, please communicate with Edward A. Steacy, (E.M., 3/c) 10 Hopson St., Utica, N. Y.

I am trying to find my uncle, August Timm, who lives somewhere in Canada. His last known address was Loon Lake or Loon River, Sask., Canada. We have not heard from him for some time. I wrote him a letter last September and it was returned with the statement that he had moved away years ago. He is over sixty years old. I am worried about him, and would be very glad if you can help us locate him. Please write Alexander Fink, 2004 Larry Street, Phila. 42, Pa.

I would like to locate a friend of mine whose name is Joseph T. O'Hare. He was a seaman first class in the Navy. When last heard from in 1945 he was aboard the *USS Schroeder* in the South Pacific. Please write Francis R. De Capot, 65 Amherst Street, Nashua, New Hampshire.

Can anyone help me locate Tech. 5th Grade Harold "Hal" Moen, formerly of Co. B. 338th Engineer G. S. Regt. He served in Africa and Italy from '43-'45. Lived some time in Alaska and now lives, I believe, in Chicago Ill. or vicinity. Please write Ernest "Shorty" Doane, 58 Childs St., Lynn, Mass.

Several months ago I wrote to you concerning the whereabouts of an old army buddy. A few months after you published my request, I contacted him.

I want to thank you very much for this service. It sure was great to renew old times. E. Doane, 58 Childs St., Lynn, Mass.

[illegible] Curtis, 3816 Hastings, El Paso, Texas, wants to know the whereabout of Lowe T. Wren who contributed several poems to *Adventure* back in 1929 and the early '30's.

Lowe W. (not T.) Wren himself saw the above and writes us: *It reminded me of a pleasant association with several editors of* ADVENTURE, *but dating back some fifteen years ago. A peculiar feature of this association is that every poem of mine, accepted by the magazine, is still living in numerous anthologies. Since, in my estimation, the enclosed poem would almost make a cover endorsement for the spirit of* ADVENTURE, *I am hoping you may find some use for it.*

We did indeed (see page 132) and hope this new bit of verse gets properly and promptly anthologized in turn and that Mr. Wren doesn't feel he has to let another fifteen years slip by without keeping in touch.—K.S.W.

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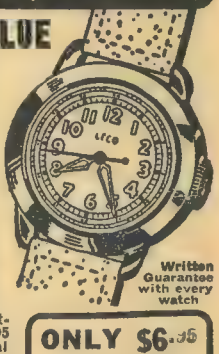

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(Continued from page 33)

"I didn't. You can reach me at the Consulate."

"You will live there?"

"No."

Suddenly the Chinese became very confidential. "You must be careful in Shanghai," he said. "It is not like the old days. In Shanghai, the assassination is regular. Regular, you understand."

He stopped short, his oval, yellow-tinted face clouded with anxiety. "The assassination is so popular now," he repeated. "I worry for you. The post-war passions are great. There are many feverish types in the city who will wish to kill you. Mind you, it is beyond dispute."

"Why?"

"*La politique,* that is why. You have taken sides in China. There are some who will think because you were a guerrilla, even though against the Japanese, that you are also anti-landlord. The landlords will wish to kill you. There are others who will say you are an Imperialist. *Il est de la nature de l'homme de se tromper.*"

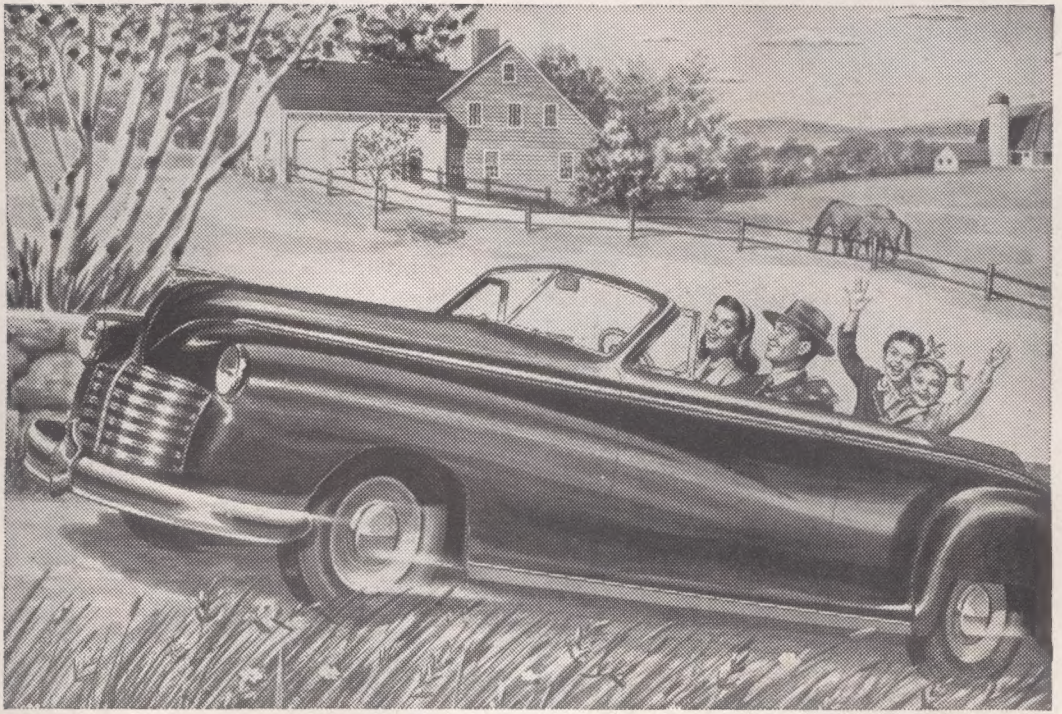
Armour stiffened slightly. He tried to measure the intent in M. Chen's effusive speech; how much might be harmless chatter, how much might be weighed as an indirect threat.

"*Alors,* the assassination is regular by me, also," the Chinese went on, his tone intimate, revealing, as though he were discussing the condition of his stomach. "Some day they shall have me. You think it strange that I do not worry? But my philosophy, of course. I have arranged my life so that my work is always done, always completed. Do not think of the next task, Monsieur, I tell myself. What was I doing before I was born? Nothing—*rien du tout.* If death takes me, then I shall be doing the same thing. But of course one takes precautions."

The train crawled into the Shanghai station. M. Chen stood and buttoned his gown.

He smiled animatedly at Armour, saying, "To avoid the assassination until you leave for America I shall loan you one of my secretaries. He is *un type très sportif,* very capable, very very modern *à la manière de Chicago.* When you leave the train you will notice him, please. He wears a golf cap."

(End of Part I)



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